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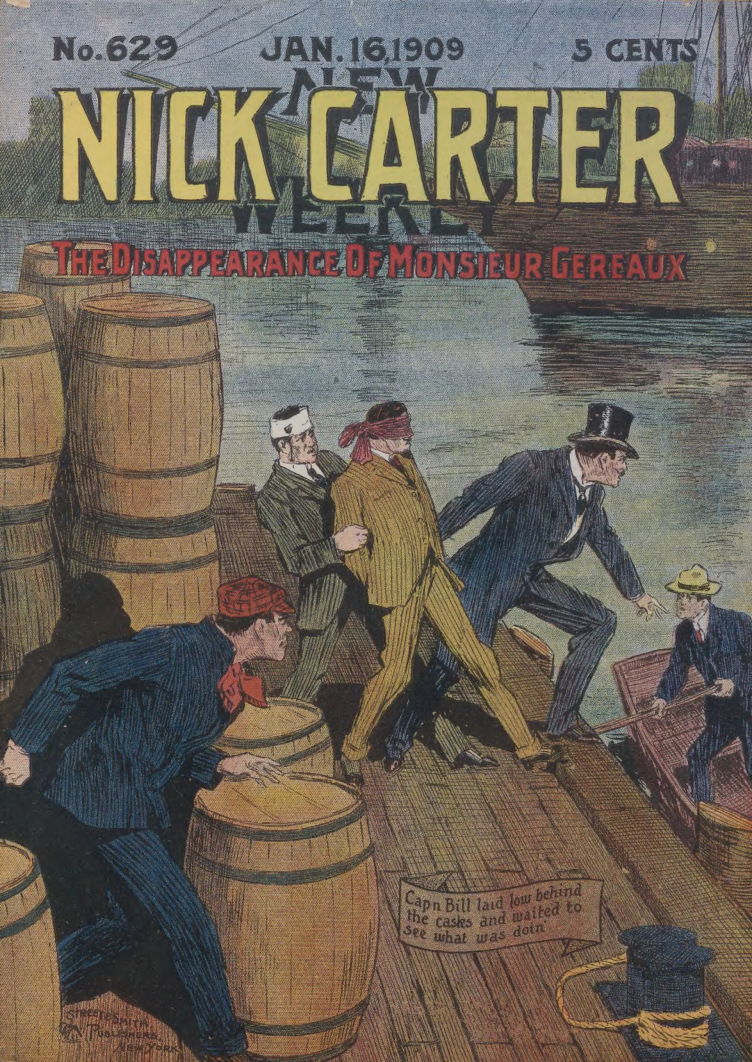
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MONSIEUR GEREAUX



NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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The Disappearance of Monsieur Gereaux

OR,

NICK CARTER AND THE RIVER PIRATES.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE VANISHING OF GEREAUX.

The acting chief of the Paris secret police had been in the City of New York about a fortnight as the guest of Nick Carter, although, at the particular request of the chief, the detective had put him up at the Cretorian Club instead of entertaining him at his home.

Gereaux had come to the United States on the trail of a pair of rascals named Pierre Laborde and Jules Creel, who had conspired together to defraud two young women, Adrienne and Yvanne Lafarge, of the sum of five million francs left to them by their father, who had been an ironmaster in one of the departments in the south of France.

In carrying out their machinations against these young women these two men had committed other crimes, notably the murder of the maid who had served the heiresses; this particular crime, Chief Gereaux had traced to Laborde before his departure for America.

The two men had then fled to the United States, having by means of threats compelled the heiresses to accompany them, and, after their arrival in the city of New York they had done them to death by means of prussic acid administered in such a manner as to make it appear that the victims had committed suicide.

In this heinous crime they had been assisted by an unnatural and inhuman half-brother of the heiresses, named Paul Lafarge.

These crimes had been traced directly to the perpetrators by Nicholas Carter, who had succeeded in accomplishing it by one of the most remarkable tests that he had ever applied to his unquestioned detective skill.*

It is not necessary that we should go into particulars concerning these other crimes, since they have nothing to do with our present story save only that they led up to it, and that it was because of them and because of the activity of M. Gereaux in trailing those men from Paris that the puzzling conditions arose which are to be recited here.

Immediately after the arrest of Laborde and Creel, and of Natalie, the wife of Laborde, which occurred in a high-stoop, brownstone house on a side street not far from Lexington Avenue, Gereaux and Nick Carter spent the evening as follows:

Having disposed of their prisoners and made the

*For complete particulars of the history of Gereaux and the heiresses, see No. 628 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

proper charges against them, the Paris chief and Nick Carter repaired to the Cretorian Club together, where they dined, and, a few hours later, repaired to a near-by theater to see a new play which for a week had been attracting considerable attention. They occupied seats that were well down in the middle aisle in the parquet, and the play had approached nearly the end of the second act when a uniformed messenger conducted by one of the ushers came down the aisle and spoke to Nick Carter, who occupied the end seat.

"The usher says that you are Mr. Nicholas Carter," he whispered. "I have a letter to deliver to M. Gereaux, of Paris, who is said to be with you."

Gereaux, who heard the remark, turned quickly and replied:

"I am M. Gereaux, young man. Give me the letter;" and Nick noticed that there was an expression of some surprise on the face of the Parisian when he received it.

The detective busied himself with the program and with watching the action on the stage while Gereaux read his letter, and did not look again toward him until the latter, bending nearer, whispered:

"This letter is rather a surprise, Mr. Carter. Will you excuse me for a quarter of an hour while I step outside into the foyer?"

For reply, Nick Carter stepped from his seat, thus permitting the chief to pass him, and Gereaux went up the aisle and disappeared, closely followed by the messenger and the usher who had conducted him down the aisle.

Nick resumed his seat and gave his entire attention to the action of the play, and thought nothing more about Gereaux until the curtain dropped on the second act, and many left their seats to stroll about the playhouse or for purposes of refreshment.

Nick retained his seat. It was a mere act of delicacy to do so, but he had the feeling that if he should follow Gereaux so soon to the foyer of the theater the act might have the appearance of meddling; it might seem that he were interested to know who it was who had called Gereaux outside.

As a matter of fact, he was not in the least interested, but he did not wish even to have the appearance of being so, and therefore he remained where he was until the curtain rose on the third act of the play.

There are plays which interest and others which do not; this one proved to belong to the former class, and Nick Carter found himself very much entertained not only by the story of the play, but by the superb acting of the characters as represented in the cast.

The consequence of this was that he forgot about Gereaux during the entire production of the third act of the piece, and gave no thought to the continued absence of the Parisian until the curtain had dropped again, and this was more than half an hour since the delivery of the note to the acting chief of the secret police of Paris.

Now the detective did not hesitate to leave his seat. There remained only one more act to the play. Gereaux had said he would be absent only a quarter of an hour, and he had already been gone more than twice that time; and so Nick stepped into the foyer, lighted a small cigar, and strolled up and down while he smoked, beginning to wonder in a vague way what could have become of his companion.

The bell rang to announce the rising of the curtain on the fourth act in two more minutes, and the detective, after one more hasty glance around him, reentered the theater and resumed his parquet chair.

The fourth act of the play was not less entertaining than the others had been, but for some inexplicable reason Nick Carter found it impossible to rivet his attention upon it.

His mind kept wandering from the story of the play to the continued absence of M. Gereaux.

Nick was not conscious that he felt any uneasiness, and yet deep down within him somewhere vague misgivings were making themselves manifest, and particularly did they do so as the act continued and the minutes fled into the irredeemable past without the reappearance of the Parisian.

Toward the close of the play the detective frequently examined the dial of his watch, and finally he smiled to himself when he discovered that he was doing that thing on the average of about once in a minute and a half—an unusual performance for Nick Carter, who rarely permitted himself to worry about anything.

Least of all should he have cause for uneasiness about a man of the character of Henri Gereaux.

Gereaux, it should be said here, was a man who had attained the topmost rung in the ladder of his profession by reason of his ability alone, and nowhere in the world should there be a man more capable of taking care of himself under all conditions than this acting chief of the Paris secret police.

Nevertheless, when the curtain finally dropped on the last act of the play and the audience arose to leave the theater, Gereaux had not returned.

It was perhaps not this fact alone which made the detective uneasy regarding the circumstances; but

rather because the Parisian had sent no word back to Nick Carter explaining his continued absence.

The detective remained where he was, near his seat, until the greater part of the audience passed out, when he followed slowly into the foyer, lighted a big cigar this time and stood there waiting, determined to remain until the lights were put out, still believing, inasmuch as he had received no message, that Gereaux would return to the theater.

While he waited, the usher who had conducted the messenger down the aisle appeared, and Nick summoned him to his side.

"You are the young man who brought the messenger to me with that note for M. Gereaux, are you not?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir."

"You followed my friend out of the theater in company with the messenger after the note was delivered, I believe?"

"Only so far as the rear of the house, sir. I did not come into the foyer."

"You don't know, then, who it was who sent him the message?"

"No, sir; I don't know who it was, although I was in the foyer when the messenger boy arrived. I heard him ask for M. Gereaux and heard him say that the gentleman was with you. I know you, Mr. Carter, by sight, and I knew where you were seated, so I took him into the theater.

"Was anybody with the messenger boy when he came into the theater?"

"I couldn't say as to that, sir. I didn't see anybody."

The detective took a dollar from his pocket and handed it to the usher, saying as he did so:

"I would like you to stand outside the theater for half an hour after it is closed, so that in case M. Gereaux returns here you can inform him that I have gone to the club. You may tell him that I will await him there."

The club was within walking distance from the theater, and Nick arrived there a few moments later, thinking that perhaps Gereaux, having been detained beyond the limit of time he had fixed, had returned to the club instead of to the theater.

Inquiry at the desk, however, when he entered, quickly disabused his mind of this idea.

Gereaux had not returned to the club, and no message had been received there from him.

Having directed that M. Gereaux be informed that Mr. Carter was waiting for him immediately upon his arrival, Nick passed into the library and, selecting a favorite book, composed himself to reading.

In this manner an hour passed, and then another, with no message from Gereaux and no sign of him whatever.

Nick, who was thoroughly aware of Gereaux's punctilious observance of all forms of courtesy, was now distinctly troubled by the continued absence of the Paris chief; and yet there was nothing that he could do to hasten the return of his friend. In fact, there was nothing whatever for him to do save patiently to await his return or to give him up for the night and go home.

After a few moments of indecision he decided upon the latter course, and wrote a note to the chief in which he stated the length of time he had waited, hoped that the business which had called him from the theater was of a pleasant character, and closed by saying that he would call at the club in the morning immediately after breakfast.

He rode home then, went to bed, and slept.

A little before ten o'clock the following morning he strolled around to the club again, his misgivings entirely vanished and having no thought but that Gereaux would be waiting to receive him.

When he stepped to the desk, however, and made his wishes known to the clerk, you may imagine his surprise when he was informed:

"M. Gereaux has not returned, Mr. Carter. He has not entered the club since he left it last night to go with you to the theater."

CHAPTER II.

BUTTONS: A STREET ARAB.

Strange disappearances are matters of common occurrence in all great cities; particularly is this true of the City of New York.

The records of police, if searched, would show hundreds of such cases which have happened within the last decade; but it is very rarely that a man of the prominence of Henri Gereaux, and more particularly that a man of his calling and character, goes out of visible existence in such a manner.

Gereaux, seated beside Nick Carter in the theater, had risen in response to a letter brought to him by a messenger boy, had excused himself for fifteen minutes, had passed up the aisle and into the foyer of the theater —and disappeared.

Every question which Nick Carter could ask of the employees of the playhouse developed no further intelligence than this:

Gereaux had been seen to lead the way up the middle aisle followed by the messenger boy and the usher; he had been seen by the treasurer of the house to pass through the foyer toward the door, still followed by the messenger boy, but from the moment that he passed the threshold of the main entrance to the sidewalk of the street upon which the theater was located, all knowledge concerning him was lost.

When Nick Carter received the information from the clerk at the club that morning that Gereaux had not returned he immediately busied himself about making inquiries, although his better judgment, as he believed, assured him that nothing could have happened to the Parisian, who had all his life dealt with the criminal classes, and who was a man of remarkable ability in every branch of his profession.

You will understand, therefore, why the detective did not make any especial effort during that day to trace out the movements of his friend; but when the hour advanced to late afternoon and then again to evening, and when the evening itself was a thing of the past, and there still was no message from Gereaux, the detective confessed to himself that something must have happened to detain the chief which was not of his making and which did not spring of his own desire.

Always courteous, both a stickler for the proprieties and ever considerate of others, Gereaux, being the guest of Nick Carter, would regard it as his first duty to communicate with the detective explaining his delay, or at least announcing the time when he would reappear.

This knowledge of the character of the Paris chief made Nick Carter feel certain that the note delivered by the messenger boy had been a decoy, and assured him that Gereaux had been called from the theater by a ruse of some sort and for no good purpose.

During the second day after the disappearance of Gereaux, Nick Carter sought and found the driver of every vehicle which had been standing in front of the theater at the time of the Frenchman's disappearance. In addition to that, he found several men, employees of the theater, a policeman, and two or three loungers about the place, but from none of them could he obtain any information whatever concerning his friend; not one among them remembered even to have seen the man pass from the playhouse to the street.

This condition of affairs continued to the end of the fourth day, with Nick Carter no wiser than he had been at the time of Gereaux's disappearance; nor could he succeed in obtaining the slightest clue which would lead even to a supposition of what had become of the Parisian.

Altogether it was one of the blindest cases that the detective had ever undertaken, and it was as if Gereaux had walked from the theater into a balloon, which had flown upward and away leaving no track or trail behind it.

It was the morning of the fifth day after the disappearance when Nick Carter, having just finished his breakfast, was glancing over the head-lines of the morning papers—he had searched the papers carefully every day since the disappearance—when Joseph appeared with the information that a boy was on the door-step who wished to speak with him.

"Bring him here to the dining-room, Joseph," the detective directed, "and fill up a plate with food. Perhaps he will have something to eat. Boys are usually hungry."

A couple of moments thereafter Joseph ushered into the room a veritable specimen of the New York street arab; a boy who was undoubtedly a character in his own way, since he had one peculiarity which was particularly noticeable the moment one saw him.

The lad did not look to be more than fourteen, or at the most sixteen, years old; his thin, ill-fed face was full of expression, and would have been handsome were it clean; his eyes were as bright as a ferret's, and the dimples in his cheek betokened a ready appreciation of the humorist; in stature he was rather undersized, although as quick of motion as a squirrel.

But the peculiarity about him before referred to was the remarkable fact that, sewed all over his ragged clothing, in every conceivable place where room could be found to accommodate them, were buttons of all sizes, characters, and descriptions.

Buttons of brass, of jet, of pearl and bone, of rubber and gilt, of glass and wood, buttons large and small, round and square, oblong and diamond-shaped, dotted his clothing in every conceivable place and rendered the lad a conspicuous person indeed.

The detective looked upon him across the table, smiling broadly.

"Well, young man," he said, "you seem to have put on your uniform before you came out this morning."

"Yes, sir; I always wear it," was the perfectly correct reply.

"And will you tell me your name?"

"Buttons," was the laconic answer.

The detective laughed aloud.

"Quite appropriate, I should say. Are you hungry, Buttons?"

"Gee, mister, I could eat a raw dog without any salt on it."

"I think Joseph has something better than raw dog. You can tackle that plate which has been put there for your accommodation. We will fill it up again when you eat what's there."

"But, sir, I——"

"Never mind, Buttons. Whatever you have got to say to me will keep until you have filled that empty stomach of yours. You know that gentlemen can talk much better on full stomachs than on empty ones."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Nick, watching the boy as he devoured the bounteous breakfast before him, recalled the play he had witnessed less than a week before, and confessed to himself that he had not felt then half the interest in that performance that he did in this one.

Have you ever seen a hungry boy eat the things he liked best? Have you ever been hungry yourself and had such things placed before you? If so, you will appreciate the expression of gratitude and of perfect content worn by Buttons while he devoured that breakfast, and when he gave a regretful sigh because he could eat no more.

"Gee, whiz, Mr. Carter!" he said. "I never had a feed like that before in all my life. But I ought to have washed my hands before I ate it."

"You didn't think of that, did you?" asked Nick, smiling.

"No, sir; the things looked too good."

"Well, have you had enough?"

Buttons grinned.

"I don't believe there's room down there, sir, for so much as a swallow o' water. I feel just like a picture of a little darky I've seen, before and after he et up the watermelon; and this is after."

"Do you think you've got strength enough left to tell me why you came to see me?"

"Gee, Mr. Carter, I clean forgot."

He thrust his grimy paw into one of the pockets of his coat and produced a folded section of brown wrapping-paper, torn raggedly on two edges of it. It was much crumpled and worn and soiled, and yet the tracing of writing in pencil was plainly visible.

Buttons passed this paper to the detective, having first unfolded it, and as he did so he said:

"When I found it, Mr. Carter, it was all crumpled up in a ball, and there was a string tied round it. On the other end of the string there was a button—this one;" and he touched a round button of jet that was sewed upon the front of his coat.

"If it hadn't been for that button, Mr. Carter, I don't believe I'd 'a' noticed the paper at all, but I saw that button shinin' in the gutter and I made for it like a sparrow goes after a worm. When I picked it up that wadded ball of paper was dangling on the other end of the string. I broke the string in two and chucked the wad of paper away; then I went on up the street.

"But I hadn't gone far, Mr. Carter, before it struck me all of a sudden as being dead strange that the big jet button was tied to the ball of paper with a string, and so I turns about and mooches back for it.

"I picks it up and I straightens out the wad, and the first thing I see—I can read writin', you know, sir—is them lines at the top of it."

The detective let his eyes wander to the paper, which he had not yet examined, and he read aloud the written words to which the boy had referred.

"'The finder will be liberally rewarded by Nicholas Carter, detective, if he will deliver this paper to him without delay.'"

Beneath that there was considerable more writing at which the detective, however, only glanced at the moment.

Nick believed in doing everything consecutively. The written message was in his hand, and he would read it in due time, but first he wished to know all that the boy had to say about it.

"Well, Buttons, where did you find it?" he asked.

"I found it in the gutter, sir, on Rivington Street, very near Allen Street. I can show you the exact spot if you care to go there with me. As I said, it was all crumpled up in a ball. You'll see, sir, that the rest of the writin' on the paper is in some other language, so I couldn't make out what it was. Maybe it's French or Rooshin; but I caught onto that bluff about being rewarded, and, besides, sir, I wanted a chance to see you, and so I didn't lose no time in gettin' here with it; and I sure have got my reward in that feast you gave me."

"When did you find the paper, Buttons?"

"About two hours ago, sir, and I only stopped long enough to sew that button on my clothes before I brought it to you."

"Very well, Buttons; if you will be silent now for a moment I will read the rest of the message."

CHAPTER III.

THE STAIN ON THE ATTIC FLOOR.

Here is what the detective read, written in French by Henri Gereaux and delivered to Nick Carter so remarkably:

"Trapped. Automobile one block from theater. Blow on back of head when looking inside of it. Return to consciousness here. No idea where I am. In a small, windowless room save for opening near ceiling not large enough to admit my head. Noise of elevated railroad somewhere near. Think Laborde, although in prison, is responsible. Possibly Paul Lafarge, brother of the heiresses. My jailers unknown to me. Am chained to wall directly under hole I have described. Chain locked around my waist and fastened to staple in the wall, which I cannot dislodge. Found this paper on the floor. Had pencil, string, and button with which I weighted it, in my pocket. If you receive this, come to my assistance if possible. I have been told that I have only a few days to live. Think I am kept alive for the purpose of some interview. Cannot determine what it is. Men in whose power I am are evidently Apaches.* I am familiar with the class and have recognized that fact. The one whose face I have seen might be Laborde himself in appearance save that he is older, bigger, stronger, and even more brutal. GEREAUX."

The detective read the message two or three times, then folded it and put it in his pocket.

"Buttons," he said, "we had a shower last night in this part of the city. Did it rain where you were?"

"Betcher life it did," was the unqualified reply.

"What time did it rain, Buttons?"

"Oh, I guess it was about ten o'clock."

"And how long did the rain continue?"

"It stopped before eleven o'clock, because then is when I turned in to get some sleep."

"This paper you brought to me, Buttons, has not been wet."

"No, sir; I thought of that."

"It must, therefore, have been thrown into the street after the rain had ceased falling."

"Yes, sir; and more than that, too."

"What more, Buttons?"

"Well, I figger that it must have been thrown into the street quite a long time after it stopped raining."

"Why?"

"Because I guess the pavement must have dried considerable before it fell, else the paper would have been wet some just the same as if it had rained on it."

"You discovered it about eight o'clock this morning, you say?"

"Yes, sir, I think it was about that time. I had sold all my papers. I get through about eight."

"I suppose you can show me the exact spot where you found it?"

"I sure can."

"Shall we go there now, Buttons?"

"Whenever you're ready, sir."

The strangely assorted pair left the house at once, took a cross-town car to a station on the Second Avenue "L," and left it at Rivington and Allen Streets.

It was only a short distance from there, approximately half a city block counting east and west, when Buttons stopped, and, indicating a place in the gutter beside them with his grimy forefinger, said:

"Right, there, sir, is where I found it."

The detective raised his eyes and intently studied the buildings on either side of the street where he stood.

They were the ordinary structures which are found in that part of the City of New York, one not being materially different from another. But the thing that Nick Carter was looking for was a square hole that should be located near the top of one of them; an aperture not larger than his own head, an opening such as Gereaux had described in his brief but comprehensive note.

Nor was he long in discovering it.

The houses at which he was looking were very old, and had been built with the eaves fronting on the street, the gables, where there were any, being east and west.

Far up almost directly under the eaves of one of these houses, evidently opening upon an attic which was above the third story of the building, the detective espied the thing he sought, a square opening through the wall of the house not larger in size than his own head.

No other house along that thoroughfare contained this same sort of aperture, and, aside from that, the fact that the wadded piece of paper had been found by Buttons almost directly beneath it was sufficient evidence to Nick Carter that this was the hole described by Gereaux in his hastily written message.

"Buttons," he said. "I haven't told you what was in that note that you brought to me, but I will tell you later on."

*Apache is the local word in Paris used to describe the vilest and most desperate class of thugs and toughs who swarm in certain portions of that city.

"Yes, sir; thank you."

"Just now, I want you to stand on guard outside this house while I go into it, and if you see anybody leave it, remember who that person is, so that you can describe him to me. Do you know any of the people who live here?"

"No, sir."

"You will wait here till I return?"

"Yes, sir."

The house was one which had formerly been a private residence in the days when that part of the city was populated differently from what it is now; but it had been transformed into a tenement-house. That is to say, that every room in it above the ground floor was doubtless occupied by its own particular family, and it is needless to say that these were, without exception, foreigners.

The front door was not only unlocked, but it was open, and was held in that position by a paving-stone that had been put against it.

Nick Carter entered the house and mounted the stairs rapidly. He had located the hole on the outside wall, and he believed he could go directly to it.

However, when he reached the top of the last flight of stairs, he discovered that he was no higher than the third floor, and that the attic which he sought was therefore still above him.

There was no apparent means of ascending to the attic; there was no stairway, although farther back along the hall he discovered where there was a trap-door in the ceiling over his head.

After studying it for a moment, the detective rapped upon the door of one of the rooms near him, and from a woman who opened it obtained the use of her table, after pointing to the trap above them and explaining that he wished to get into the attic. At the same time he gave her a half-dollar in anticipation of the use of her table. He was turning away with the table to place it under the trap when it occurred to him that she might have some information, and he stopped and asked her:

"Do you happen to know, madam, if anybody has been in that attic during the last twenty-four hours?"

"I ain't seen nobody go up or come down," she replied stolidly, "but I've heard footsteps over my head, and so I guess somebody's been there."

"When did you hear them?"

"Oh, I've heard them for the last four or five days."

"And when did you last hear any noises over your head?"

"Last night, sir."

"What time last night?"

"It was after midnight, I think. I was awakened by them."

"What kind of noises were they?"

"It sounded to me as though two or three men were having a rough-and-tumble fight," she replied.

"Did you make any investigation as to the cause of it?"

"No, sir; why should I?"

"Well, when one hears the noise of a fight such as you have described, it is quite natural to be curious about it."

The woman smiled wanly and replied:

"We don't get curious in this house, sir. There ain't a night but what there's a fight going on in some part of it, and when we hear one we keep just as far away from it as possible. It ain't pleasant to be brought up in court as witnesses."

"Did you hear voices during the fight?"

"Mebbe; I don't know. I just heard the noise of a scuffle and a struggle, and two or three heavy falls on the floor over me. That's all I know about it."

"Do you think anybody is up there now?"

"I haven't any more idea than you have, sir."

"Will you steady this table for me while I investigate?"

"I'd rather keep out of it, sir, if you don't mind."

"Oh, all right, you may return to your room and close the door. I can get along very well alone. When I'm through with your table I will return it to you."

"You needn't do that, sir. I will come out in the hall and get it after you are gone."

Having placed the table under the trap, he sprang upon the top of it, from whence he could easily reach the trap-door above him.

It yielded readily to his touch, and he had no difficulty in pushing it aside, after which he raised himself slowly through the opening and presently stood in the dark and foul-smelling attic. His electric torch was in his pocket, and he flashed the light of it about the place, perceiving only that it was filled with rubbish, and that near him toward the front of the building was a heavily constructed partition with a door that was padlocked on the outside.

The ordinary padlock is the easiest of all locks to pick, and this one yielded readily to Nick Carter's efforts, so that in a moment more he threw back the door and then stepped backward himself while again he flashed his light, this time into the room which he had no doubt was the place where Gereaux had written the note so strangely delivered to him.

No noise of any kind greeted him as he flashed the

light through the open door, and after that first instant of hesitation he stepped forward and passed inside the room.

There was no one there.

Directly in front of him was the staple in the wall which Gereaux had described in his message, and dangling from it a steel chain, while near it on the floor was an open padlock.

An assortment of burlap bags were scattered about the place; but these were not what now particularly attracted the attention of the detective.

Directly in front of the place where the staple was fixed in the wall was a splotch of blood, and, leading over it toward the door, a jagged line of it which gradually diminished until it was reduced to mere spots and droppings.

The stains were not yet entirely dry, as he presently discovered, and they were all the more significant for that reason.

The detective knew that beyond a doubt Henri Gereaux had been a prisoner in that room until an early hour that same morning.

Where was he now?

Had he already met with the fate he had referred to in his message to Nick Carter?

CHAPTER IV.

BUTTONS MAKES A PROPOSITION.

It was evident to Nick Carter that one of two things had happened. Either the captors and jailers of M. Gereaux had somehow discovered that he had thrown a message from the window and had removed him, fearing the consequences, or the time had arrived soon after he did so for them to take him away to carry out the purposes for which they had captured him.

But again his eyes sought the stain on the floor, and he feared lest that they had done even worse than that and had put the man they held entirely out of the way.

That there had been a fight in the room the evidence of the woman with whom Nick had talked assured him; but it might as well have been a fight between Gereaux's jailers as between Gereaux himself and them.

In fact, as the detective thought about it, he considered the former circumstance the more likely of the two for the very reason that Gereaux had doubtless been chained to the wall while that fight was going on.

Nor would the Paris chief have been likely to have tackled several powerful and brutal men under the circumstances by which he was surrounded. Gereaux was naturally a cautious man. He was one of the kind who would await a golden opportunity rather than spoil all his chances by acting too hastily.

Gereaux was also another thing; he was a very great detective.

His effort at communicating with Nick Carter by means of the written message delivered by Buttons proved that, and, in proving it, suggested another thing.

It suggested that Gereaux would let no person suspect him of leaving behind him some evidence of his presence there, and that he would lose no chance which might offer itself to indicate in some subtle way what had been done with him and in what direction he had been taken when he was removed from this room.

The detective therefore at once began a most careful and painstaking search of every part of that room, and particularly that part of it closest to the place where Gereaux had been chained to the wall.

He looked for a scrap of paper; for another wadded ball of it like the one he had already received, but there was nothing of the kind to be discovered. He picked up one by one the burlap bags and shook them out, and from one of them several grains of wheat were scattered upon the floor, and in that instant Nick remembered that he had noticed some grains of wheat on the front door-step of the house when he entered the building.

"I wonder," he asked himself, "if Gereaux found wheat enough in one of those bags to perhaps fill one or more of his pockets. If so, it is safe to assume that those grains of it I found in the lower hallway were dropped there when he was taken from the house. I'll look for more grains of wheat when I go down."

Again he examined the floor where Gereaux had been chained to the wall, and now he found a tiny mark of white no longer than his thumb-nail, and it was made so faintly that if he had not bent closely over it and flashed his light directly upon it, he would not have seen it. The mark was not a straight line, and, as has been said, it was not longer than his thumb-nail, but at one end of it was another mark still smaller, but made in the form of an inverted V, so that the straight mark joined it inside exactly at the meeting of the angles.

In other words, the marks represented the crude form of an arrow, otherwise a pointer; and it told Nick Carter as plainly as written words might have done that Gereaux had somehow possessed himself of a small piece of chalk—possibly he may have had it in

his pocket—and that he would, whenever the opportunity offered, make other marks of the kind to indicate in what direction he was being taken away.

Had Gereaux been any other man than he was, save possibly one of the detective's own assistants, this chalk-mark would have had little or no significance, inasmuch as it is not likely that the ordinary man would think of such a plan or conceive such an idea for giving out information.

But with Gereaux it was different.

Already he had sent one message to Nick Carter which he believed, if found, would be delivered, and he knew Nick Carter well enough to realize that if it were delivered the detective would find the room from which the message had been thrown into the street.

When he discovered the room he would find the chalk-mark; more than likely he would find the grains of wheat, and, because their professional experiences and the habits of their lives made Chief Gereaux and Nick Carter think along the same lines, Gereaux would believe that his friend, the American detective, would understand these signs he left behind him.

Nick Carter did understand them. He lost no more time by spending it in that room of Gereaux's imprisonment, but quickly returned to the street, noticing on each landing as he approached it and also at the entrance grains of wheat that had been scattered not too liberally.

On the pavement outside the house and directly in front of it were a few more grains; not too many, but enough to indicate to Nick Carter what he wished to know, and they told him that when Gereaux was taken from the house his captors had started away with him toward the East River.

"Come along with me, Buttons," said the detective to his young companion, "and don't talk until I speak to you, but keep those bright eyes of yours peeled for grains of wheat like those there. See them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, that's what we're looking for now. I want to find more grains of wheat, and we want to go in whatever direction they may lead to."

"Yes, sir; I guess I understand what you mean."

"Those grains of wheat, Buttons, were dropped for our benefit by the man I want to find; the man who wrote that message you brought to me."

"Yes, sir."

"He has got some of them in his pocket, probably not a very large supply. He will make them last as long as possible."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Buttons, another thing. Keep those sharp eyes of yours on the lookout for a chalk-mark anywhere on the pavement. No matter what kind of a chalk-mark it is, call my attention to it if you see one."

"I will, sir."

They started ahead then in the direction indicated by the grains of wheat, which took them eastwardly along Rivington Street toward the river.

Between the corners along the street they rarely saw any of the wheat, but always at the corners, that is, at the opposite one as they passed another street, they found others to indicate that the direction was still straight ahead.

So, one after another they crossed Orchard, Ludlow, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Clinton, Attorney, and Ridge Streets, but turned through Pitt into Stanton, and then went eastwardly again along Stanton Street to the river, and the grains of wheat led them actually out upon the pier at the foot of Stanton Street.

It was there at the end of the pier where they found the first mark of chalk. It was a well-made arrow, though small, and it was drawn in the form of a quarter-circle with the arrow pointing up the river.

"That means," said the detective, "that the men who had Gereaux in charge had a boat waiting for them at this pier. Buttons, they have taken to the water, and I am afraid I have lost the trail."

"You just wait a minute, Mr. Carter, and I think I can find out all about that boat."

"Why, how can you do that?" asked the detective, interested at once.

'Well, sir, I like the water pretty well. I spend almost all my spare time down here on the river-front, and I know pretty near every man who hangs out around here."

"Splendid, Buttons! Do you happen to know anybody who owns a boat?"

Buttons was silent for a moment, and so evidently confused that the detective at first did not understand this attitude; but presently the lad spoke up and said:

"It's just this way, Mr. Carter. You've been mighty good to me, and I am just as proud as I can be to be of any service to you. I want to help you all I can in this matter, and I think I can help you a lot if only you will let me do it in the way I want to, and——"

He paused, and Nick Carter asked him gently:

"And what, Buttons?"

"And if you will consent not to let these men down here know who you are or what your business is."

"I think I understand you, Buttons."

"Yes, sir; I think you do."

"Well, go ahead with your explanation nevertheless."

"It's this way, Mr. Carter. These men I want to ask questions ain't particularly pleased to have detectives or even policemen any too close to 'em. Sometimes the things they do ain't done exactly under an electric light. They're a good deal like the big rats around this wharf. The darkest nights suit them the best."

"I understand you, Buttons."

"It's pretty plain, ain't it, Mr. Carter, that that man you're lookin' for was brought to the end of this pier?"

"Yes, Buttons, I think it is."

"It's pretty plain, too, ain't it, that when he left this pier he got into a boat?"

"I feel quite sure of that, my lad."

"Well, sir, there ain't a boat around this neighborhood that I don't know about, and there ain't a man around this neighborhood that uses boats that I don't know. Some of 'em are junkmen, and some of 'em might be called by another name that don't sound quite as good as that; but they're all good fellows—that is, they've all been good to me, and I wouldn't do a thing to get one of 'em in any trouble; not for anything in the world. I'd rather lose a hand, or even every button I've got."

"Then you certainly are in earnest, my lad."

"Yes, sir; and if you'll agree——"

"I'll agree, Buttons, for I know already what you would ask."

"You'll promise me that you'll forget these men after I show you who they are?"

"Yes, Buttons."

"And no matter what you may happen to find out against them while we're on this lay, you'll never use it?"

"I never will, Buttons."

"That's plumb on the level, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes, Buttons, plumb on the level."

"Then you just sit down over yonder on them logs and finish your cigar while I mooch around the neighborhood and see what information I can pick up. I won't be long."

And, without waiting for an answer, he wheeled about like the sprite he was and dashed away on the run.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIL OF GEREAUX.

Buttons had said that he would not be absent long, but nevertheless it was an hour before he returned, and when he did so he was accompanied by a tall, lank, and somewhat fierce-looking individual, who in appearance was outwardly a longshoreman, and who, in fact, as Nick presently discovered, was one of those characters who are river junkmen by day, and river pirates by night.

As they approached the place where Nick Carter was seated awaiting them, Buttons stared at the detective in undisguised amazement.

He had left a well-dressed, clean-shaven gentleman awaiting him on the pier; he found upon his return a slouchy-looking individual who bore very little resemblance to the Nick Carter he had left an hour before.

For Nick had used the opportunity during his absence to enter a store on South Street, which he had espied from the end of the pier, and there to make sufficient alterations in his appearance as not to excite the suspicion of whatever person or persons Buttons might bring back with him, but had still retained enough of his own personality so that Buttons would recognize him nevertheless.

He knew that the lad was shrewd and sharp enough to guess at once why this change had been made and to appreciate it; and in this he was not disappointed.

After that first look of startled surprise in Buttons' face, the lad grinned broadly, and, with ready wit, exclaimed as he drew nearer:

"Hello, Mr. Nichols! I have brought back a friend with me who says he can help us find Sam Jones. Mr. Nichols, I'll make you acquainted with Cap'n Bill Gunn."

He paused for a moment while the two so oddly introduced to each other shook hands, and then, speaking rapidly, he added:

"I explained to Cap'n Bill that you thought Jones was up against it kinda hard. That he was a friend o' your'n that was kinda lyin' low, and that you was dead eager to find him; an' all that Cap'n Bill wanted to know was that it wasn't any police business. I just give him my word for that, Mr. Nichols, an' as he knows me an' I knows him that's all that was necessary."

"Thank you, Buttons," said Nick, in reply. "Now suppose you do the questioning."

"Gee! I've already done a lot o' that."

"Well, what does Captain Bill have to say about it?"

"Why, he knows the hull game; he sure does."

"Tell me about it," said Nick.

"Well, you see it's this way. Cap'n Bill had been out pretty early this mornin' taking a row around the river-front for pleasure. I guess mebbe he's been playin' poker with some o' the canal-boat cap'ns just below here. Anyhow, he says that it was about half-past three o'clock or mebbe four when he pulled his boat up under the pier and put it away."

The detective nodded comprehendingly.

"He had climbed to the top o' the pier and was about leavin' it when he saw four men come out o' Stanton Street and come onto the pier, an', seein' how late it was, Cap'n Bill didn't feel jus' like bein' any too friendly with strangers, an' so he mooched back behin' them casks over there, and waited to see what was doin'."

"It strikes me, Buttons," interrupted Cap'n Bill, "that you're getting mighty blamed particular about this."

"Aw, shut up, Bill; Nichols is all right. I knows him."

"Well, go on then, kid. I ain't never found you on the wrong side yet, an' I don't believe you ever will be."

Buttons turned again to the detective.

"Cap'n Bill laid low behin' them casks while the four men come out on the pier together," he continued. "One of 'em had his hands tied together behind his back, and there was a black bandage over his eyes to blindfold him, and that, you see, Nichols, must 'a' been Jones."

"Yes," said Nick, smiling, "there's no doubt about that."

"The other three, Bill says, was dagos or some kin' of foreigners, anyhow. They was as dark as dagos, and one of 'em, he says, was mos' as big as he is, with a heavy black mustache and one o' them little tufts of hair on his lower lip. They was talkin' together in some lingo he did not understand, but he don't think they was dagos, quite."

"Go on, Buttons," said Nick, "we're losing time."

"Oh, no, we ain't losin' no time, as Bill 'll tell you soon."

"Well, fire ahead, Buttons."

"One of the three men had a bloody towel wrapped aroun' his head, and the other was bleedin' at the nose, and Bill sized it up that the three of 'em had been havin' a fight together and that the big fellow had done 'em both up; anyhow, Bill says he was boss of the proceedings."

"What happened after that?" asked Nick.

"Bill says they went out 'most to the end of the pier and that one of 'em got hold of a painter and pulled a boat out from under it, which they all dropped into and rowed away."

"In that case," said Nick, "I don't see that we're any nearer following them than we were before."

"Oh, yes, we are," replied Buttons. "You ain't sized Bill up just yet."

"Go on, then; explain."

"Well, you see, Bill knew the boat."

"Oh, I begin to understand you now."

"He knew the boat, who it belonged to, and where it was kept; so he sized up that they had borrowed it, and would return it to its owner, which means that he knows where it went after it left here."

"Perhaps the men stole it and do not mean to return it," suggested Nick.

"Bill says that ain't possible."

"Why not?"

"Because he knows the man that owns it."

"What difference does that make?"

"Well, Bill says he ain't one that lets things get stolen from him, and besides he keeps the boat where nobody, not even the fly-cops, could find it."

"That is something, certainly," said Nick.

"Bill says somethin' more, too."

"What is it, Buttons?"

"He says that he don't think there's any sort of use in tryin' to do much in the line of followin' them until late this afternoon, 'cause Sandy Bragg, which is the owner of the boat, is asleep, gettin' ready for business to-night."

"Oh, I understand."

The detective turned then to Captain Bill Gunn and asked:

"Do you think, Captain Bill, that we'll be able to follow those men?"

"Shore," was the unqualified reply.

"I gather from your manner that you have a pretty good idea where they are."

"I'd be willin' to bet long odds that I can take you almost straight to 'em."

"Do you mind telling me where?"

"Nope, not at all, since Buttons stands for you."

"Let me assure you, Captain Bill, that whatever Buttons has said about me to you I will stand for until the last gun is fired, and there's my hand on it."

"That's all right, mister," said Gunn, after they had

shaken hands, the detective's being almost lost in the huge paw of the big man.

"When Buttons vouches for any man on the river-front, it's all right. He's the squarest little kid on Manhattan Island. I've knowed him since he was as little as my thumb, and I ain't never knowed him to do a mean act in his hull career."

"That certainly is a good recommendation, Gunn."

"Yes, and it ain't saying half enough."

"Now, about those men. Where do you suppose they have taken my friend?"

"They took him to Brooklyn."

"You think so?"

"I'm positive of it."

"Have you any idea where?"

"Sure, I've told you that already."

"Well, where?"

"Well, sir, it ain't far from the navy-yard, I think you'll find. It ain't necessary to tell you just the street and number, nor just what sort of a place it is, because I think mebbe Sandy wouldn't like me to be particular about it, but you can bank on it, Mister Nichols, that Sandy didn't let any man have his boat when he wasn't with it without knowing pretty certain who and what they are and what they intended to do with it."

"I gather from that," said Nick, "that your idea of finding what has become of those men is simply to go to your friend Sandy Braggs, and ask him about it."

"You hit that nail, mister, plumb on the head."

"And Buttons suggests that we can't see Sandy until late this afternoon."

"Not before four o'clock, nohow, or some time between four and six."

"And you know where to find him, so that he won't get away from us?"

"I sure do."

"Shall we cross the river by the ferry, or the bridge, or how?"

"That'll be just as you please, only Buttons suggested that mebbe I'd better take you over in my boat."

"That's good of you, Bill. I've got some money in my pocket, and if you will give up your time to helping me out in this matter, I'll pay you twice as much as you could make in any other way in the same length of time."

"That's just about what Buttons thought you'd do."

"I will do it, Captain Bill; and if we succeed in finding my friend and rescuing him from those men I will add a substantial amount to what I have already promised."

"Then, that's a bargain, mister. I'm under your orders from this out until you discharge me."

"In that case, suppose we go across the river without delay. Where is your boat?"

"'Tain't more than a thousand miles from where we're standing."

"Oh, I remember; Buttons said you put it under this pier."

"Right you are, mister."

"Have you any objections to getting it at this time of day?"

"Not a mite. But I've got one suggestion to make."

"What is it?" asked the detective.

"If you'll come with me across South Street to a room I've got over there, I'll fit you out with a different-looking hat from the one you've got on, and with two or three other little things that will make you look a little more like what I want you to be."

"That's a good idea," said the detective.

Half an hour later, with Nick transformed in appearance to a veteran longshoreman, the three entered Bill Gunn's boat and started for the Brooklyn shore.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HUMAN CYCLONE.

It happened that the tides in the East River as they were crossing it were almost at that point which is called "slack," and when their boat had about reached the middle of the river, Bill Gunn rested on his oars for a moment, and, leaning forward, looked Nick Carter squarely in the eyes and said with slow deliberation:

"There's one thing, mister, that I'd like very much to have you agree to before we go any farther."

"Very well," said Nick, "what is it?"

"Buttons has vouched for you, all right, and I take Buttons' word always, but I want you to add your say-so to what he's already said, and to do it after the manner that I shall now state."

"Very well," said Nick, "I'm ready."

"Mister, mebbe you know and mebbe you don't know that most of us men along this river-front, on both sides of it, have our own peculiar ways of doing business. Some of the things we do would be looked upon as dishonest by people that don't exactly understand them. Sometimes we get the river cops after us, and a good many of us are called river pirates by these same cops. I'm a junkman by profession, and when a

sailor offers to sell me a hawser or a cable or anything that he happens to have on hand for sale, I don't ask no questions as to where he got it. I buy it and pay for it, and later I sell it and get paid for it."

"I understand," said Nick.

"Well, before we're through with this here expedition I've got to run you up against a good many friends of mine, mebbe, who are in the same line of business that I am."

Nick nodded, but remained silent.

"I've got to introduce you to them fellows, and I've got to vouch for you when I do it."

"I understand that, also."

"Naturally, they're mighty suspicious about any stranger."

"I can appreciate that, Bill."

"But if I take you to these friends of mine and I say something like this: 'Here's a friend of mine, in the same line of business as ourselves, only he comes from Boston,' why, they'll just take you right in for what I said. They're likely to ask you a good many questions, and now I'm wondering if you're smart enough to answer them right if they do."

"I think so," Nick replied, smiling.

"Well, then, shall I say Boston?"

"As well as any other place."

"Do you know Boston harbor, and Boston waterfront, and Chelsea, and East Boston, and all the other places around there?"

"Very well indeed, Bill."

"Then if you should happen to meet up with a fellow over here that knows Boston, it would not faze you none?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, then, Mr.——"

"One moment, Bill. If I am to pose over here among your acquaintances as an old friend of yours, it won't quite ring true if you call me mister."

"That's as sure as you're alive."

"So you had better select some name yourself. One that is quite familiar to you and which can, therefore, be readily adopted."

"All right; I'll call you Bill, same as my own name."

"Very good. Now, what were you going to say when I interrupted you?"

"I was going to say this, Bill," said the river pirate. "I was going to say that I wanted you to swear to me before we go any farther that no trouble of any kind 'll ever come through you to any man I introduce you to while you're with me."

"I will take my solemn oath on that," replied the detective.

"Then that settles it. I think we're started out straight and square;" and he picked up his oars again and went on across the river with powerful strokes.

When at last they had rowed in under a pier on the Brooklyn side, which was located not very far from the navy-yard, Bill Gunn lighted his pipe and folded his arms and remarked:

"I don't know as I rightly sized up this situation, and I don't know that you wanted to be any plainer about it than you have, but it occurs to me that if I knew a little more about it I could help you a whole lot better. Now, it's up to you whether you want to tell me or not, but what you tell me goes, and you can bank on that."

Nick looked past Bill Gunn to Buttons, and met the shrewd little eyes fixed upon him. He also saw a slight shake of the lad's head, and understood perfectly what it meant.

He had, in fact, been on the point of opening up to Bill Gunn; of telling him exactly who and what he was and explaining why he was there.

But he understood from that little negative shake of Buttons' head that it would be better not to do so, and so, without any appreciable pause, he replied:

"About a week ago, Bill, a man who is a Frenchman came over here from Paris to see me. Buttons has told you that his name is Jones, and Jones is a good enough name to call him by for the present, although he wasn't born with it."

"Jones is good enough for me," said Gunn. "I don't care anything about what his right name is. I've almost forgotten what mine was."

"He came to New York to see me," continued the detective, "and it isn't necessary that I should tell you what he wanted to see me about unless you insist."

"No; I don't care anything about that, either."

"He had some enemies on this side of the water, and he made several more after he got here. Not very long ago they called him out of a theater when we were seeing the show together. They rapped him on the back of the head, bundled him into an automobile or a hack or something, and carried him away. He managed to send a message to me to that effect, and now I'm looking for him and want to find him."

"Is he a good fellow?"

"One of the best I ever knew."

"Do you think that those chaps that had him in tow last night mean to do him up?"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Maybe, then, they've done it already?"

"No, Bill; I think they are keeping him for some reason in order to obtain some information that he is possessed of."

"You think, then, that they ain't made a stiff out of him yet?"

"No, I hardly think that."

"It looked to me this morning early when I saw him as though they were taking him out into the river to dump him overboard."

"I don't think so," said Nick, shaking his head.

"Well, it sure had that look to me. I came mighty near interfering."

"I think you will find that they took him across the river to the other side, and that they have got him imprisoned somewhere over there now."

"Mebbe so."

"They are playing a game, Bill, which means a big pile of French money to them. If they can bring my friend Jones to a certain agreement with them he can make is much easier for them to get the money."

"Oh, I see."

"I think that will be about the game they will play."

"Then it's a pretty safe proposition that they haven't hurt him much yet."

"That is my idea," said Nick.

Gunn was silent for several moments, thinking deeply, and Nick thought it best not to disturb him; and presently the river pirate said:

"As I told you a little while ago, I think I could make a pretty close guess as to where they'd lock him up if your ideas about it are correct."

"Yes?"

"There's an old warehouse over there where we're going that's pretty generally infested by the class of men I've been describing to you. Sandy Braggs is regarded as a sort of leader among 'em, and there ain't a nook or cranny in that old warehouse or in the hiding-places under it that Sandy Braggs don't know about. More than that, there's a pier almost directly in front of the warehouse that looks as if it wasn't fit to tie a skiff to, but it would hold a man-o'-war. I'll show you something that will surprise you when we get to that pier."

"This isn't the one, then?" asked the detective.

"Well, I guess not; not much. You didn't think I'd take you straight to Sandy's place, did you?"

"I didn't know. I hadn't thought about it."

"We've got about a quarter of a mile to walk, Boston Bill, and I guess we may as well start. Do you play seven-up?"

"Oh, yes."

"And checkers?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then, I'll introduce you into a place the like of which you ain't never seen before. You'll find some of the men there sound asleep. You'll find some others of them playing checkers, and seven-up, and old sledge, and maybe a game or two of pinochle. It's a kind of a club that they run over on this side, and maybe it'll interest you."

"I'm sure it will. Is that where we will find Sandy?"

"Sandy won't be far off, but it ain't safe to wake him up when he's snoozing. He's likely to take it unpleasant, and Sandy ain't nice when he's cross."

"Tell me something about Sandy Bragg."

"Did you ever see a human cyclone, Boston Bill? Did you ever see a man with the strength of an elephant, and the venom of a rattler, and the quickness of a tiger, and the smoothness of a snake all rolled into one? That's what Sandy Bragg is. He's about as tall as me, and about twice as wide, and he's got a pair of arms on him like an ape. He can take any two men I ever saw and hold them both with one hand. That's Sandy Bragg."

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIVER PIRATES' CLUB.

"I am putting a mighty sight of confidence in you, Boston Bill," said Gunn, as they left the pier and walked along the river-front together.

"You are making no mistake in doing it," was the detective's reply. "Some day, perhaps, there'll be an opportunity for me to demonstrate how much I appreciate it. When that opportunity comes, if it ever does, I won't forget you."

"Oh, I can size a man up all right," replied Gunn. "It ain't often I make a mistake, and I've got Buttons' word as well as yours. Buttons, you little cuss, what are you hanging back there for?"

"I found another button," he replied, running forward and exhibiting it.

"Did you ever see a funny little cuss like him, Boston Bill? How many buttons do you think he has sewed onto them ragged little clothes of his?"

"I haven't an idea," said the detective.

"Well, sir, when Buttons and me didn't have nothing to do we counted them, and I want to tell you right

here that it took us more than half a day to do it. He's got more than twelve hundred buttons sewed onto them clothes."

"Why do you do it, Buttons?" asked Nick, putting his hand on the lad's shoulder and patting it affectionately.

"I don't know," replied the boy. "I can't remember when I didn't collect buttons. Somehow they mean something to me."

"Can't you tell me what they mean?"

"Well, mebbe so; only it's a kind o' dream."

"Dreams are sometimes pleasant things, Buttons. Tell me about your dream."

"Well, sometimes I can see the face of a bootiful woman, and I can see pictures, and curtains, and shinin' things all around me in a room that's so splendiferous that you can't think about it. And I can see the face of that bootiful woman lookin' at me, and in my dream she's my mother."

"That's a very fine dream, my lad, but what has it to do with the collection of buttons?"

"I don't know, unless it is that I always liked things that shone, and it seems to me in that dream as if I had a lot of those things to play with—shining things, you know. The only things I could ever find that seemed like 'em were the buttons; but always when I've found a button it brings back my dream to me, and so I keep needles and thread in my pocket and I sew them on my clothes so I won't lose them."

"Have you any home, Buttons?"

"No; I never had one. That is, not until I found Cap'n Bill. I stay with him nights, now."

They walked on in silence a little way, and then the detective said in a quiet tone:

"Buttons, I want you to promise me that after we are through with this matter, you will come to see me the first Sunday after it. I want to have a talk with you."

"All right, Mr. Nichols, I'll promise."

There was nothing more said by any of them after that until after they had turned into a blind alley and had advanced along it two or three hundred feet, then Gunn remarked in a low tone:

"We're almost there, Boston Bill. We'll stop in front of an iron door that is let into a dark wall, presently, and after I have given a certain signal the door will open. It's up to us then to slide in out of sight as quick as possible."

The iron door was reached, the signal given, the door opened, they entered, and Nick found himself in utter darkness, but at once he felt Bill Gunn's big hand resting on his shoulder, and he was guided forward by devious ways, turning into dark places to the right and to the left, about-facing and going ahead, and he knew that he was being led around and through a mass of warehouse stuff that was stored there.

At last they paused while another signal was given, and, passing through a second door, they descended a narrow, spiral stairway which led down and down until Nick Carter believed that they must be almost below the surface of the river.

Here he was again taken in hand by the big river pirate, and now they walked over naked earth, turning and twisting as before, and passing through barriers like those that were behind them; until finally they came to a halt, and Nick Carter heard not far distant the ringing of a bell in a peculiar manner.

He knew, of course, although he could not see the act, that Gunn had given the signal. A moment more and the door opened, whereupon they took several steps upward and stood in darkness until the door behind them closed with a loud click which proclaimed that it was locked.

Instantly still another door in front of them opened, and they were greeted by a flood of light and advanced into a room enormous in its size and remarkable in its aspect.

Nick Carter in all his varied experience had never seen such a room as that one before. Not less than fifty feet in extent in either direction, the floor of it was covered with sand, one wall of it lined with lockers, another with casks and barrels, a third with all sorts of curios gathered from every part of the world, the fourth with firearms and cutlases, knives and daggers, spears and bows, boomerangs and axes—in short, every implement of warfare and chase that can be imagined.

And these were arranged in fantastic patterns along that wall, rendering the exhibition unique as well as startling.

Throughout the entire room tables and chairs were arranged promiscuously, and seated at these tables were men of many nationalities; silent, preoccupied-looking men they were. Many of them engaged in games.

Some with cards, some with dice; others with checkers and chess.

There were young men and old men, little men and big men, beared men and smooth-faced men, but upon every one of them was the same stamp of self-reliance and fearlessness.

Followers of the sea most of them had been, and in rank they ranged no doubt from boatswain to captain. Many of them raised their heads and nodded when Gunn entered with his companions; others paid no attention whatever to the newcomers.

Gunn himself having stepped to the center of the room, followed by Nick and Buttons, spoke in a tone that every one there could hear, and said:

"Boys, I have brought an old pal here with me today, and I guess it's enough when I say I vouch for him. His name is Boston Bill and he hails from there. He's the right sort and you can bank on him."

Some of the men nodded and waved their hands in salutation. Others grunted a word or two of reply, but nobody there seemed especially interested.

Bill Gunn, taking this as a matter of course, turned again to Nick Carter and waved one hand toward the wall along which the casks and barrels were arranged and said:

"You'll notice that those casks and barrels have each got a spigot in them. Maybe it ain't necessary for me to say that there's something behind each one of those spigots, and you can see for yourself that there's a tumbler on top of each barrel. Every one is labeled, and if you can read you'll know what you're taking. It's a rule of the place that we don't never ask nobody to drink, but if you happen to want one, help yourself. I can vouch for it all being good stuff, because every bloomin' bit of it is imported. It comes straight out of the hold of vessels to this place. I don't drink myself, Boston Bill, and I don't guess you do very much, at least you didn't use to, but you're at liberty to help yourself to anything you want."

He dropped into a chair at one of the tables, Nick and Buttons following suit, and then he rapped loudly upon it with the palm of his big hand, whereupon a huge Swede, whom Nick had not noticed before, came forward.

"Boland," said the river pirate, "if you can rustle up something to eat, I'll make it worth your while. I am hungrier than a bear, and I guess we all are."

It was only a very few minutes after that when a plate of steaming corned beef, with plenty of potatoes and a cup of coffee, was placed before each of them, and Nick felt presently that he had never eaten anything in his life that had tasted better.

When they had completed their repast, Gunn again addressed the Swede.

"Where's Sandy?" he asked.

"He ain't turned out yet," replied the Swede, "but I heard him say that he was going to get up early."

"What time is it now?"

"Most half-past two."

"Then, if Sandy was going to get up early he ought to be showing himself before long."

"I think so," replied the man. "He's got something on foot that he wanted to attend to. He let out his boat last night and didn't go out of the place himself, but he didn't go to bed very early for all of that."

Gunn turned to the detective after the Swede had taken his departure and remarked, with a grin on his face:

"I guess I could have told him about the letting out of that boat. However, Boston Bill, it won't be long now before Sandy shows up, and it won't take us long after that to find out what's what."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHIEF OF THE PIRATES.

If the reader will stop to consider the devious methods which the detective had been compelled to use in order to trace the captive Gereaux as far as he had gone it will be realized and appreciated that no little detective-skill was used.

As it is related here, as each incident is told and explained, it is made to appear extremely simple and easy of accomplishment, but, nevertheless, if you, reader, were to undertake it, starting out with as little to go by as Nick Carter had in the beginning, you would find that you had by no means an easy task.

All professions and all businesses have their experts. In each and every line, no matter what it is, some one man will be found who is better qualified than his fellows in the line he pursues.

It has been said that long practise makes perfect in anything, and long and continued practise, assisted by close application, had developed Nick Carter to a point where his powers of reasoning were so acute that he readily read a cause from an effect.

You will recall the fact that at the time of the disappearance of Gereaux from the theater there was absolutely no clue whatever as to what had become of him. It should be said, however, in justice to Gereaux himself, that his own proficiency in his chosen profession was the real cause for Nick Carter's present success.

Had Gereaux been less acute and less alert it would not have occurred to him to have written the letter he had on that scrap of paper when he was imprisoned in that room.

To most prisoners, confined as he was, the small hole in the wall over his head would have suggested nothing more than a means of ventilation and an imperfect and inadequate means of getting light in the daytime.

To Gereaux it had meant liberty.

Listening from the room where he was imprisoned he heard the sound of elevated trains passing to and fro not far away. That and other sounds which he undoubtedly heard assured him that outside that hole there was a street.

Being a street there, he knew that people were constantly passing to and fro along it.

He relied upon the cupidity of mankind. He knew that if he wrote a message, beginning it with the promise of reward if it were delivered at a certain place, that ninety-nine out of a hundred who might find it and read it would not hesitate to undertake its delivery. It being delivered, Gereaux could readily leave what remained to be done to the sagacity of his friend Nick Carter.

And yet there were other means also for aiding Nick Carter in that search he would undertake.

Gereaux had no doubt in his own mind that the note would be some time delivered, and that Nick Carter would trace it to its source and so discover the room where it had been written.

The burlap bags on the floor had suggested to him that they might have contained grain of some sort, and, by shaking them, he discovered the wheat. Whether he found the chalk in that room or had it in his pocket was not yet determined, but by using the wheat he had succeeded in leading Nick Carter and Buttons from the house in Rivington Street to the pier at the foot of Stanton Street, and by the use of the chalk he was enabled there to indicate that he had been taken in a boat upon the river for the continuation of his journey.

Then came the almost invaluable assistance rendered by Buttons; his familiarity with the characters along the river-front; his intimacy with the one man among them all who could render them the most assistance; and, after the experience we have seen when they crossed the river, and when they came finally to the river pirates' clubhouse beneath the old warehouse on the Brooklyn side.

Having finished their meal and with the table cleared, Gunn suggested checkers, and a moment later he and the detective were deeply engaged in that attractive game, with the shrewd, sharp eyes of Buttons critically observing them.

The first game was won by Bill Gunn, the second by the detective, the third by Gunn, while Nick Carter took the fourth, and so they played on and on for nearly two hours, evenly and fairly matched, and Nick Carter confessed to himself that he enjoyed it hugely.

Each time the door opened Gunn raised his eyes to inspect the man who entered, and each time he dropped them again to the game.

But at last, when it was nearly half-past four in the afternoon, the door did admit the man for whom they were waiting. Sandy Bragg walked into the clubroom of the river pirates.

Looking upon him, Nick Carter felt that even from the imperfect description of the man given by Bill Gunn, he would have known him.

He was a man of such large proportions as would have attracted attention anywhere.

It was not that he was very tall, although he must have stood nearly if not quite six feet in his stockings,

but he was unusually broad across the shoulders, massive in the breadth of his chest, and muscular in his general make-up. His arms were enormous both in length and size, and he moved with a springy step that suggested the quickness of a cat, or the agility of a panther. His face was quiet, serene, and subdued, and it was a strong face withal.

The moment he appeared, Bill Gunn left his seat, although the game of checkers they were playing was not half-finished. He strode straight across the room, exclaiming:

"Hello, Sandy, old pal, I came here a-purpose to see you. I've got a friend here with me that I want to interduce."

Sandy, with a nod to the others in the room, crossed to the line of casks and helped himself copiously from one of the spigots, then he called to the Swede, giving an order for something to eat, after which he returned to Gunn and with him approached the table where Nick was seated.

"This is Boston Bill, Sandy," he said. "He's an old friend of mine, and he's on the level, and he's got a little business that he wants to transact with you, which I have promised that I'd help him do."

The keen eyes of the chief of the river pirates—for although he was not such nominally, there was no denying that he was such in fact—sized up in one quick and searching glance the man to whom he had just been so quaintly introduced, but what his mental decision was, whatever opinion he may have formed from that investigating look of his, did not show upon any lineament of his features.

He was grave and sedate as he acknowledged the introduction; he did not offer his hand, and, indeed, Nick Carter had already discovered that it was not the custom among these men.

"You'd better speak right up in meeting, Boston," said Gunn. "Sandy never deals with nobody only in the open. Tell him your tale of woe as you've told it to me, and he'll say mighty quick whether he'll help you or not."

Sandy's eyes were fixed upon the detective while Gunn was talking, and now in his quietly grave tone he remarked:

"That's the truth, Boston, I only deal in the open. Lay your cards on the table face up, and if I can help you without going against any of my principles—why, I'll do it, that's all. I always stand to help anybody that's recommended to me by Bill Gunn."

And so the detective told him relatively the same story he had already told to Gunn; the same one he told when they were in the middle of the river in the boat.

During the recital Sandy Bragg's expression did not once change. He remained as perfectly motionless as if he were carved from the bronze his complexion imitated. His steel-gray eyes never wavered, and when Nick had finished he asked quietly:

"What is this man Jones to you, Boston?"

"He's a very dear friend," replied Nick concisely.

"You say that he is a Frenchman and a Parisian. How does it come that you have a very dear friend who lives so far away from Boston?"

"I have spent much time in Paris, Sandy, and in London, and in Hong Kong, too, for that matter."

"I guess that's a sufficient answer."

"I hope it is."

"What do you want me to do, Boston?"

"I'd like to have you put me wise to the place where those 'Apaches,' as they are called in Paris, have taken my friend Jones, and, if it is possible, I'd like to have you help me rescue him."

"I can't do the last," said Sandy, shaking his head. "I have in a sort of a way given my word that I wouldn't. I never go back on my word, Boston."

"You needn't tell me that, Sandy Bragg. One need only to look into your eyes to know it."

"I might meet you half-way in the first part of your proposition," remarked the chief of the river pirates meditatively.

"Very well; half-way will be much better than none at all."

"I'll have to turn it over in my mind though, Boston, first."

"Take your own time, Sandy. I can wait with all patience so long as I know that Jones isn't in any immediate danger."

Sandy shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess he's in danger, all right, Boston, as long as he's in the hands of that crowd he's in now. I wouldn't trust them as far as I could throw a two-ton anchor."

"In that case, the quicker he is rescued the better."

"That's true enough, too, Boston, but in any case we can't accomplish anything before night. We'll have to wait until night, anyhow. I'll think it over."

"Where shall I wait for you until you decide?"

"Right where you are. I sha'n't be leaving before midnight at the earliest."

Again he bent his searching eyes upon the detective, and, after a moment's scrutiny, he remarked:

"I think, mebbe, Boston, I'll ask you to go to my room with me for a little private conversation."

"As you please, Sandy. I'll be ready whenever you want me."

"In the meantime, don't let yourself worry about your friend. I think he's safe enough until to-night."

CHAPTER IX.

SANDY BRAGG SPRINGS A SURPRISE.

The detective and Bill Gunn resumed their checkers; Buttons curled himself up in one corner of the room and went to sleep.

Sandy Bragg strolled about the big room, stopping first at one table and then another, and engaging different men who were there in conversation with him, and it was more than two hours later before he again approached the detective and said, in his mildly quiet voice:

"If you'll come with me to my room now, Boston, we'll hold that little confab I spoke about."

Nick arose at once and followed Sandy from the room.

The traversed a corridor that was black, until presently, at a word from Sandy, the detective halted.

Nick could see nothing, but he could hear the movement of what sounded like an iron ring, and presently a draft of cold air blew into his face, bringing with it the smell of salt water and a feeling of dampness; then out of the blackness and seemingly coming from the floor beneath him, Nick heard the voice of Sandy say:

"Step forward a little, Boston, but be careful; there's a hole here and I want you to come down through it."

Feeling his way cautiously, Nick advanced until Sandy Bragg's hand touched one of his ankles. From there his foot was guided farther forward until it rested upon the rung of an iron ladder, and again he heard Sandy's voice.

"Go down the ladder past me," he said. "I'll stay behind to close the trap."

It was only a short distance to the bottom of the ladder, and Nick stepped off it upon a cemented floor, where he was presently joined by Sandy, who grasped him by the arm and led him forward.

In this manner they passed through two doors that were closed behind them, and presently entered what Nick knew to be some kind of a furnished room, although the darkness was still so intense that he could see nothing.

But Sandy struck a light almost immediately, and a lamp with a reflector upon it soon illuminated the apartment.

Sandy chuckled audibly.

"I suppose, Boston, you're a little bit surprised at my quarters, ain't you?"

"Well, yes, a little, Sandy. It looks cozy and comfortable here. Where are we?"

"You're beneath the old pier. In fact, you're seated now below the surface of the river, but we're surrounded on every side by good, solid, cement walls, and not a drop of water ever enters here. I built the place myself some years ago, and you are the first man that I have ever brought into it."

"That's rather a remarkable statement, isn't it, Sandy?"

"No, I don't think so; not under the circumstances."

"But why should I be the first and only man you have brought here?" asked Nick.

"Well, I've got a pretty good reason, Boston; I'm inclined to think that you'll regard it as a mighty good reason when you hear it."

"I shall be glad to hear it when you are ready to tell it to me."

"My reason is that because I know that you are no more Boston Bill than I am. It's because I happen to know that you are Nick Carter!" he laughed. "I see that I surprise you."

Nick had indeed taken a step backward to be a little distance farther away from Sandy, and he had dropped his arms straight against his sides in order to be in readiness to use those weapons he carried in his sleeves on spiral springs, if such an effort should be necessary.

But Sandy Bragg made no belligerent movement or gesture. He stood directly in front of the detective in the same attitude he had assumed after lighting the reflector-lamp, and there was a half-humorous, somewhat quizzical expression in his steel-gray eyes. He was wholly at his ease, and not a thing about him was threatening.

"I knew you, Carter, the moment I entered the club-room," he said mildly. "There's a chair over yonder. Won't you sit down?"

Nick hesitated.

He knew that he would be at a disadvantage if he accepted the chair which Sandy proffered him, but he knew also that by far the better way to treat this strange character, whom he had often heard of but never up to now run across, was with absolute frankness, and, after a moment, he dropped upon the chair, smiling as he did so, and, taking two cigars from his pocket, extended one of them toward the river pirate chief.

"I guess I surprised you some, Carter," said Sandy, as he accepted the cigar, lighted it, and took another chair at the opposite side of the table.

"It would be futile to deny that. I had an idea that I was not known here, and would not be; and even now, although you have recognized me, although you seem to know perfectly well who I am, I have no recollection of ever seeing you before."

"I don't think you ever have, Carter; but on one occasion, two or three years ago, you were pointed out to me. It was an occasion which I have good cause to remember, and your face and figure were so perfectly engraved upon my memory at that time that I think I would have recognized you to-day if you had worn a disguise an inch thick."

"What was the occasion? Will you tell me that?"

"Yes. It happened on the corner of Broadway and Fourteenth Street, in New York. A little child was very nearly run over by a car as it turned the corner, and it would have been killed had you not saved it. You were on the car, and you sprang over the front and picked the child up from the ground when you saw that the motorman could not stop the car, and it seemed to me when I saw your act as if you must have hung on by your eyelids when you did it. Do you remember the circumstance now?"

"Yes," said Nick, "but I had forgotten it until you reminded me of it."

"Did you ever find out whose child that was?"

"No; a man stepped forward and claimed it, and, I believe, thanked me for what I had done. The car went on down Broadway and I don't think I have thought about it since until now."

"The child was mine," said Sandy, and he blew a cloud of smoke over his head.

"Really!" exclaimed Nick, greatly surprised.

"The child was mine, Carter," Sandy repeated in the same even tone. "It has died since, and so has its mother, but I haven't forgotten what you did for it that day. I had left the kid for a moment in charge of a friend while I stopped into the cigar-store on the corner. I came out of the door just in time to see the accident and to look on while you rescued it. Carter, that was the only time in my life when I was ever afraid. I trembled like a woman with a nervous chill, and I don't think I stopped trembling for an hour, but my friend with whom I had left the kid, and who received it from your hands, told me who you were. You can bet your life that I took a good look at you. I have never forgotten you, Carter, and I never will. I have never forgotten what you did for me that day, and I stand ready from this out to serve you in any way I can."

Nick started from his chair and extended his right hand, but Sandy Bragg did not move.

"You don't want to shake hands with me, Nick Carter," he said in that same even tone. "We don't belong to the same class. You're an honest man and I'm not.

You're a gentleman and I'm a thief. You're a detective and I'm a river pirate, although ostensibly a dealer in junk. Our ways are as wide apart as the poles. It would be your duty if you had any case against me to arrest me, and, if possible, to convict me. But if you are willing to accept the aid of such a man as I am, and accept it as man to man as a partial recompense for what you have done for me, you shall have it to the end of the chapter."

"Indeed I will accept it, Sandy, and I am very grateful to you for speaking as you have done, but I notice that you ask no favors of me."

"And I will ask none, Carter. A man who would save a child as you did mine that day need never be asked to make promises. I know without your saying so that you will go away from here and forget that you have seen me. I know and perhaps I am glad of it that I am much safer from you now than I was three hours ago."

Nick made no reply, and Sandy continued:

"Who is this man that those fellows brought across the river in my boat last night? His name isn't Jones."

"No," replied Nick, "he is the chief of the secret police of Paris; but he is what I told you, a good and a dear friend of mine."

"What's he doing on this side of the water?"

"He came over here in the interest of two young women who had been defrauded of almost all their fortune."

"And what have those fellows got against him to hold him captive now?"

"I don't know that exactly, Sandy, but I expect that their whole idea is one of revenge."

"You said something when you told me the story about him about their wanting him to sign something or about their wanting to get some information out of him before they killed him."

For reply the detective took from his pocket the written message from Gereaux that Buttons had brought to him that morning.

"Can you read French, Sandy?" he asked.

"Yes; as well as I do English."

"Then read what is written there;" and the detective passed the letter to the river pirate.

Sandy took Gereaux's message and read it through to the end in silence; then, returning it to Nick Carter, he said quietly:

"I guess I can get him out of his present trouble all right, but, as I told you before, we can't make a move until after dark."

CHAPTER X.

THE RIVER PIRATE'S REASONS.

"Carter," said the river pirate, after a considerable pause, "I would cheerfully give up ten years of my life if by doing so I could recall the last five of it, and could have met you, and known you as I was before that time. I was as good a man as you are."

"If you feel like that, Sandy," said the detective, why don't you drop all this business you're at now and go back to the good life? Live it as you ought to do."

The river pirate shook his head.

"It's too late for that now," he said.

"I suppose you know the old saw about 'It's never too late to mend'?"

"Oh, yes; but must old saws are rusty and no good. They may be all right in theory, but they amount to very little in practise. I was driven into this life; forced into it, I might say. It's an odd little story, and I won't bore you by telling it, but I got among a lot of fellows one night whom I knew nothing about; before the night was over they were rounded up and arrested by a lot of cops, and I was taken with them. Nothing could be proven against me, of course, for I was not guilty of any wrong-doing. I was not even aware of the kind of company I was in. Nevertheless, although I produced plenty of evidence to establish my previous good character, I was given six months on the island."

"That was too bad," said the detective.

"It was a foul wrong," replied Sandy bitterly. "I was more deeply embittered than I realized at the time, but all the same when I left the island I had no thought of drifting into this sort of life; but the stain of a prison sticks to one, Nick Carter, and I could not wash it off. Wherever I went it was known that I had

been in prison. I got the name of being a crook even though I was not one, and had never been one, and finally I decided to have the game as well as the name. That is why I'm here."

"But it's not too late to turn back, Sandy."

"Yes, it is. At least I will not turn back. I have too many obligations surrounding me here. Those fellows out there in the clubroom belong to a class by themselves. I am a sort of chief among them. They look up to me as their leader and their arbitrator. If a dispute arises among them, I settle it, and they regard my word as law. In their way, Carter, even if you doubt it, they are good, square fellows."

"I do not doubt it, Sandy."

"I am very careful about whom I permit to join that club, Carter. No ordinary crook can come there. We have our particular and peculiar methods of doing business. We have our own rules and regulations by which we live and conduct our affairs, and we are a community by ourselves, ostracized, it is true, by all the world, and yet sufficient unto ourselves."

"Yours is a peculiar position, Sandy."

"Yes; it has its drawbacks and it has its advantages, too. Somebody has said somewhere that he would rather be a king among dogs than a dog among kings. I think that quotation expresses about what I feel."

"And you have no fear that I will ever betray you or this place to which I have been brought?"

"I am just as sure that you will not as that you are seated in that chair at the present moment."

"You're a good reader of character, Sandy, to say the least."

"I have to be to occupy the position I do among my fellows. Have you any idea what sort of a place you're in now?"

"Only what you have told me."

"I'll tell you more that you may know. It will interest you."

"Very well, Sandy. Do as you please about that."

"The warehouse in which the clubroom is situated is my own individual property. I am the owner of it under my right name, and by that name I am known in a certain locality of Brooklyn where I have another home. It is true that I do not visit it more than once or twice a year, and that my neighbors believe that I am abroad most of the time. You observe, do you not, that I have made considerable money since I spent those six months on the island?"

"Yes, it would seem so."

"I bought this old warehouse for a song. It was almost a ruin and I fixed it up. I succeeded, also, in getting a lease for twenty-one years of this old pier under which we are talking now. I fixed that up, too, inside, but I left the outside of it in such a condition that it is rarely used save in cases of emergency, and even then it is located so badly for the river craft of to-day that it is avoided. One line of steamers which ply between here and South America uses this pier and this warehouse. You would find, if you examined it, that hemp and South American hard woods and occasionally some coffee are the only things that are stored here. Aside from that neither the warehouse nor the pier is approached by others save on rare occasions. One of my associates in the clubroom we have just left is my manager. Another one is the superintendent of the warehouse and pier, and so you will observe that I have everything pretty much in my own hands."

"You're a great organizer, Sandy, and you will forgive me if I say that you should have turned your abilities to better uses."

"Oh, I know it. I know it only too well. But I love this life, Carter; not the part that is stealing, but the danger that goes with it, and I have an honest affection for the men I am associated with. Many of them would fight to kill if attacked, but those same men would be as tender-hearted as a woman to any one they liked. You men of the law know very little about us people of the underworld."

"I suppose that is true."

"It is true. Our world's as different as two planets. We are outcasts and Ishmaelites. Our hands are against every man on the other side of the gulf, just as their hands are against us. We are literally at war, and, little by little, we grow into the belief until it becomes a settled conviction, that we do no wrong when we prey upon the people of the other world, that are constantly by every means in their power working for our undoing."

"It is rather a distorted idea of morality, is it not, Sandy?"

"Distorted, if you wish, from your standpoint, very true and very real from ours."

"You're a queer combination, Sandy. You might have been a preacher in the pulpit somewhere and accomplished wonderful work."

Bragg uttered a sardonic laugh.

"I studied for one," he said; "I suppose it has left its brand upon me."

"Can nothing turn you from these ideas? Can nothing call you back to that other life and induce you to leave this one?"

"Nothing."

"Why?"

"I owe society nothing, Carter. It committed an irreparable wrong against me when it sent me for six months to Blackwell's Island. It put a brand upon me then which can never be effaced. It tattooed me with the mark of prison life, with the insignia of a criminal, with the sickness of a moral leper. Nothing effaces or cures those things. Once put upon you they stick, and stick forever. There is no getting rid of them."

"Tell me," said Nick, seeking to change the subject, "how you happened to run afoul of those three men who have Gereaux in their power."

"Getting sick of that other subject?" asked Sandy, with a smile.

"No; not sick of it, but I don't see where it can benefit either of us. In discussing it you only make me regret more deeply with every word you utter, the condition I find you in. You are a great man gone wrong, Sandy, and I do not care to dwell upon the spectacle. Tell me, if you will, about those Frenchmen."

"Well, I happened to know one of them some years ago. He remembered me and looked me up."

"Which one was that?"

"The big fellow."

Nick referred to the letter which Gereaux had written him, and remarked:

"You saw here, did you not, that M. Gereaux says that he is very much like a man whom we know as Pierre Laborde?"

"Yes, I noticed that when I read the letter. This man's name is Laborde, too."

"Then possibly the two are brothers?"

"Likely enough."

"Tell me more about him, Sandy."

"I made his acquaintance some years ago when I was going about the harbor after dark one night. He was aboard a ship that was at anchor off Bedloe's Island. He sold me a lot of stuff, and on his next voyage he brought me a lot more. I met him on and off half a dozen times. I gave him an address then which I use among the sailors, so that they can send me word when they are bringing me something that I happen to want. A little more than a week ago he wrote me saying that he was here and would like to see me. I answered it and made an appointment, and the result of that appointment is what has brought you here today."

"I understand now," said the detective.

"But, Carter, since you have been here I have discovered that Laborde has lied to me. I'll do 'most anything for a man as long as he tells me the truth, but when he lies to me, I haven't got much use for him. That is why I am so ready to help you now and to turn the tables on Frank Laborde."

CHAPTER XI.

BUTTONS' DREAMS.

It was half-past eight o'clock that evening when Sandy Bragg, accompanied by Nick Carter, returned to the river pirates' clubroom under the warehouse.

On the way there, Sandy Bragg said to the detective:

"Our confidences are, of course, between ourselves, Carter. Hereafter I will address you only as Boston, and Gunn does not need to know differently."

"No;" replied Nick, "and that reminds me, Sandy, of something I want to tell you."

"Well, what is it?"

"Buttons knows who I am."

"He does; the little rascal."

"He took me at my word, just as you have done," was Nicks reply. "It was Buttons who found Gereaux's letter in the gutter and brought it to me."

"Oh, I see. I understand now. And say, Carter, before we go inside, there's another thing I'd like to get off my mind."

"What is that?"

"It's something about Buttons."

"Well, Sandy, what is it?"

"I don't in the least know who he is or where he came from, but he has belonged to good people somewhere. I don't think there's any doubt about that."

"Nor I," said Nick.

"I shouldn't wonder, Carter, if somewhere in the world that kid has got a father and a mother if he could only find them, and, knowing him as I do for a bright little shaver, who is as square and true as any man of five times his years that ever grew up—knowing him as I do, if I was in your business, and followed your profession, I'd lay everything else aside and find his parents for him."

"Could you help me, Sandy? Is there any suggestion you could make about it?"

"I don't know as to that, Carter. I might help you a lot and I might assist you none at all; but I have talked a good deal with Buttons. I like him almost as much as if he were my own kid. He comes here frequently to see me, and I spend hours up there in the clubroom chatting with him. He makes me feel better somehow every time he comes. Sometimes I take him out on the river with me, but you can bank on it that I never do anything that's wrong when he's around."

"I believe that."

"Well, I've talked with him a lot. He has told me about his dreams, and each time after I have talked with him I have jotted down memoranda of what he has said. I've got it all safely put away. When you get ready to take his case in hand, come to me and we will talk it over."

They entered the clubroom, then, and found Gunn deep in the mysteries of a game of pinochle.

"Time to leave, Bill," said Sandy. "That is, if you're going with Boston and me."

Gunn jerked his thumb toward one corner of the room, where Buttons was sound asleep, and Nick Carter watched Sandy as he crossed the room and bent over the recumbent lad. He noted how gently the river pirate touched him to awaken him, and what a soft and tender cadence his tone took on when he spoke to the boy.

"Wake up, laddie," he said, "we're going to get a move on us now."

Buttons leaped to his feet with one motion, as quick as a cat, and wild-eyed, and, for an instant, frightened.

"You scairt me, Sandy," he said. "I guess I was having one of my dreams."

"About the lady and the shiny things in the beautiful room?"

"Yes; it's always about them, Sandy."

"How did she look this time, laddie?"

"Just as she always does, and, oh, so bootiful."

"Did you think it was your mom this time?"

"Oh, I'm always sure of that, now."

"And did she tell you in your dream that some day you would find her again?"

"She didn't in this one, but she nearly always tells me that."

"The last time we talked about it, laddie, you said that she had promised you in your dream that some day she would tell you your name. Has she told you yet?"

"No, but she always tries."

"Well, you must keep trying, too, and some day she will tell you. I've had a dream, too, Buttons."

"You have? What have you been dreaming about, Sandy?"

"I've been dreaming about your mother, too, laddie, and your dad as well, and you. I've been dreaming that you're going to find them."

"On the level, Sandy? You're not guying me, are you?"

"Kid, do you think I'd guy you on such a subject as that?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, I've been dreaming that before very long you're going to make a new friend. Mebbe you've made that friend already. In a minute I'm going to whisper his name in your ear; but you mustn't mention

it aloud to anybody after I have done so except to him."

"I won't, Sandy."

"In my dream, laddie, I thought you went to that man whose name I'm going to whisper in your ear pretty soon, and told him about your dreams of the lady with the beautiful face, in the room that's so handsome and where the pretty things shine; and I thought you asked him to help you find your mom. And I saw, laddie, that he said he would help you; and, Buttons, there isn't a man in all the world who could help you do that so well as he can."

"But who is he, Sandy?"

"Listen, kid, and I'll whisper the name in your ear now."

"Yes; I'm listening."

"But you must remember your promise not to mention the name to anybody, and certainly you must never mention it here."

"I won't. I promise you that."

The chief of the river pirates bent down, and, placing his lips close to the ear of the listening boy, whispered:

"Nick Carter!"

The boy started as if a bee had stung him. He sprang backward and away from Sandy with dilated and defiant eyes, while his lips shut tightly together and his small hands clenched themselves firmly.

But Sandy, who had anticipated the movement, reached out and touched him upon the shoulder.

"Be careful, Buttons," he said, in a low tone, "he is my friend as well as yours."

He returned then to where Nick and Gunn were awaiting him, and made some laughing remark about it's being rather early in the evening for him to go out, and then, when Buttons joined them, he said, in his usual even tone:

"Kid, are you going to be a man and go with us to-night?"

"You betcher life I am, Sandy."

"I don't know whether you ought to do it or not, kid. There's liable to be some scrapping before it's over, and you might get hurt."

"Huh!" said Buttons, with disdain. "I guess I can scrap as well as you can, Sandy, even if your name is Bragg."

For the first time since Nick had known the man, Sandy laughed aloud.

"I guess you'll grow to it, sonny. Come along."

It was noticed as they left the clubroom that there was not a question asked as to their destination; that not a single pair of eyes were raised as they went out, and that no curiosity was manifested about where nor regarding their reasons for going.

When they were upon the street, Sandy led them to a car, from which they presently changed to the elevated railroad, which they left again at the corner of Broadway and Gates Avenue, which is quite near that part of Brooklyn known as Bushwick.

From there Sandy led them to Bushwick Avenue, thence to Marguerite Street, and thence along that thoroughfare toward the left until they came to a lane which led away to the eastward, which was grown up with grass and weeds on either side, and which had not yet attained the dignity of a thoroughfare, although there were streets and houses all around it in every direction.

Sandy led them through this lane until he presently halted under a row of willow-trees.

"I think it will be wise now, Boston," he said, in his even, drawling tones, "if we decide upon some plan of campaign. We're not very far from our destination."

"Well, Sandy, you know more about what's got to be done than I do. Suppose you tell me something about how you expect to find conditions when we do arrive at our destination?"

Sandy jerked his thumb over his left shoulder and replied:

"Out there in the middle of a field, surrounded by a grove of trees and a lot of bushes that are so thick that it can hardly be seen, is an old farmhouse that should have been torn down many years ago. Not because it's old, but because it has been deserted so long by respectable people, and because it has become the resort of the people who happen to be there now."

"Do you mean the old Kluger farmhouse?" asked the detective.

"Yes; I see you know it."

"I've heard about it," said Nick. "Do you think our men are there?"

"I know they're there, Boston; I don't think anything about it."

"Who directed them to this place?"

"I did."

"Are there only just the three who crossed in your boat last night from the New York side?"

"No; there's another one. I sent him out here ahead of them."

"Who is he, Sandy?"

"Oh, he's a youngster who is about seventeen years older than his years. He's a youth who isn't fit to tie up the shoe-strings of an ordinary man. I guess, Boston, he's the brother of those girls you told me about. His name is Paul Lafarge."

CHAPTER XII.

A STRUGGLE BETWEEN GIANTS.

By the light of the stars, Nick examined the dial of his watch as they approached the house along the shaded lane, discovering that the hour was shortly after half-past ten. There was no sign of life or activity about the place as they drew nearer to it, and it was not until they had passed around it to the rear that they discovered a light shining in one of the windows from the upper floor.

It was only a glimmer of light they saw, however, for the shutters were closed and the curtains inside were drawn so that it would have been impossible to see inside the room even had they been stationed differently.

"I guess," said Sandy, whispering in Nick Carter's ear, "that we'd better go right inside the house without standing on ceremony. I kinda feel as though something was going on in there at which we'd better be spectators. I've had a hunch for the last half-hour that we weren't arriving here any too soon."

"Come ahead," said Nick, "only tell me how you propose to get inside."

"That's dead easy, Boston. I've got a key."

They ascended the back porch with Sandy leading the way, and they placed their feet upon the boards with great care lest the creaking of one should alarm the people inside the house.

Sandy, true to his word, produced a key and inserted it so gently in the lock that even Nick Carter, who was standing close to him, could not hear the noise of it.

Turning, then, he touched his fingers to his lips as a sign of caution, and motioned them all to pass inside, after which he reclosed and fastened the door.

In a whisper which was audible to each of them, but the sound of which could not have penetrated ten feet from them—and this is an art which belongs almost solely to the people of the underworld—he said:

"I will lead the way up the stairs. Boston will follow me, Gunn will follow him. Buttons will bring up the rear; and, Buttons, right here and now my orders to you are that if there's any scrappin' goin' on, you're not only to keep out of it, but you're to keep out of the way of it. You know that when I give an order like that, I mean it.

"Now to proceed. I know what room they're in, and the probability is that they're all together. There's a door that opens from that room into another one at the front of the house, which said door is likely enough half-open, or, if it isn't, I can fix it so that we can hear.

"I shall take you into that other room. If you keep close to the wall in going up the stairs they won't creak under your tread. If you, Boston, will put one hand on my shoulder, and if Gunn will do the same by you, and Buttons will cling to Gunn's coat-tails, we'll do the act finely.

"I suggest that after we get into that room that we keep mighty dead still for a moment in order to size up what's going on. After that we can act as circumstances suggest."

He was starting ahead when he turned again and once more whispered:

"Just one more thing, Boston. If it comes to a scrap, I would like it as a particular favor if you'll leave that fellow, Frank Laborde, to me. He lied to me, you know."

That was all. He turned again, and the strangely assorted procession slowly mounted the stairs.

Arriving at the top they went the length of the hallway, where, as silently as if he were a shadow, Sandy opened the door and they passed into the room that he had described at the front of the house.

It was dark in there save for the light that shone through a half-opened door between it and the room behind, and from which they could plainly hear voices in conversation.

Had Nick Carter not known better he would have thought at that moment that the man who was speaking in that room was Pierre Laborde himself; but Pierre Laborde was at that moment in the Tombs, and this man who was talking must be his brother, François.

The conversation that was taking place in that other room was conducted in French, which, as we already know, both the detective and Sandy Bragg perfectly comprehended, but which was entirely unintelligible to Gunn and the lad, Buttons.

Translated, it was as follows:

"You see, M. Gereaux, that there isn't a single chance left for you. You are here entirely at our mercy. We could take your life, and *will* take it unless you agree to our plans and conditions, just as easily as I flirt my handkerchief in your face. So.

"Ah, monsieur, I see you do not like that little act of mine. You regard it as an indignity, but, believe me, my dear chief of the secret police of Paris, it is not half so much an indignity as I shall presently visit upon you unless you make it possible for Paul Lafarge to get possession of the few million francs his father left to his sisters.

"And, my dear monsieur, it will not be so great an effort on your part as you seem to imagine. You have only to fix the records in your office so that some other person than Paul Lafarge will be made responsible for the crimes he is known at the prefecture to have committed.

"When his name is cleared by the law; when there is no more reason for the police of Paris to hound him, he can go before a court of justice and easily establish his claim to the fortune as being the son of Henri Lafarge, the ironmaster.

"You, yourself, Gereaux, can swear that he is that, and there will be no difficulty if only the charges against him are quashed.

"Now, what say you, monsieur? Will you agree to our proposition and give us your word of honor, which we know you will not break, that you will carry out this arrangement exactly as it has been stated to you? Or will you swallow a few drops of this very quickly acting acid that is contained in the phial I hold in my hand?"

"I'll do neither," replied the chief hotly.

"But think, monsieur. Do you prefer death to life?"

"No; but I prefer death to dishonor."

"But you said you would do neither. Do you mean that you would not swallow the liquid? Because you know in that case it can very easily, with four of us here, be forced into your open mouth. A few drops of it and you are dead. You are aware of that? No?"

"Certainly I am aware of it."

"It is prussic acid I have here, monsieur. You know that?"

"Yes."

"And you think that you prefer death to the little arrangement I have suggested?"

"Infinitely."

"You know, monsieur, that I might have asked you to do much more. I might, for instance, have requested you to go before the authorities in this country and free my brother from his present troubles, but I have not done that."

"No," said the chief, with an ironical laugh. "You have good reason for not doing that."

"Indeed, monsieur. What reason?"

"Because with him out of the way, if Paul Lafarge should inherit his father's money you would get half of it, no doubt, and eventually, when you found a good opportunity to murder Paul, you'd get all of it."

The listeners in the other room could, in their imagination, almost see the shrug of Frank Laborde's shoulders at this.

But the remark of the chief had the effect of changing Laborde's attitude and manner.

From the suave, persuasive, soft-toned gentleman, he became upon the instant the tough, the rascal, the "Apache" of Paris.

"Gereaux," he said, and it was scarcely the same voice that had spoken before. "I will give you five minutes to consider my proposition. At the end of five minutes, if you do not agree without more words, we will leave your corpse and depart!"

In the other room, Sandy leaned and whispered in Nick Carter's ear:

"I guess that's our cue. If you're ready, come on! Remember, Laborde belongs to me. You can take your choice of the others."

The big man rose to his full height then, and took a quick, catlike step forward, then, with a blow which might have been delivered with the back of an ax-head, he sent the door between the rooms flying open and on the instant bounded through it with the agility of a panther, so that almost before Frank Laborde could turn about to see what was happening, he had seized upon him and tossed him as if he were a child straight into the arms of two of the others who had turned to face the intruders.

It has already been said that Laborde was a giant in some ways.

When he struck the floor he bounded to his feet like a rubber ball, and, with a bellow of rage, dashed at the man who had attacked him.

Nick Carter saw them come together, but after that instant his own attention was taken up by another of the "Apaches," who sought to escape past him toward the door.

Even as Nick grappled with this man, he saw Gunn seize on the third one; and he saw also that the fourth, whom he had no doubt was Paul Lafarge, dashed past them all toward the door by which they had entered the room.

His own struggle with the man he had seized upon was very short. It was finished almost as soon as it began, for Nick, in grappling with him, seized him in a ju-jutsu hold, and sent him whirling over his head, so that he alighted a few feet away senseless, and, thereby, helpless.

Gunn had made even shorter work of his opponent. His huge fist shot out like a battering-ram, and, catching the smaller of the three "Apaches" on the point of the chin, raised him from the floor and sent him flying backward, so that the top of his head struck forcibly against the partition wall.

Then, as Nick looked around toward the door to see what had become of Lafarge, he nearly laughed outright, for, standing in the middle of the doorway was little Buttons with a pistol in his hand, and, directly in front of him with arms raised high above his head, white and trembling, was Paul Lafarge.

But another spectacle drew the attention of every conscious man in that room.

Sandy Bragg and Frank Laborde had grappled each other in that terible hold which is known as the strangle, and at the instant Nick Carter discovered that Sandy was slowly but surely forcing the Frenchman's head farther and farther back.

The duration of this spectacle was not more than a few seconds of time, but it seemed as many minutes. Then the Frenchman's muscles suddenly relaxed, and the instant they did so, Sandy released his hold, and, seizing the man anew in the grip of his two powerful hands, he raised him high above his head and dashed him upon the floor as if he had been a clod of earth.

The fight was over and won.

The detective now stepped quickly forward, and, with a few quick slashes of his knife, relieved M. Gereaux of his bonds, and the latter, springing to his feet, bowed with true Parisian grace before them, remarking as he did so:

"I thank you, gentlemen, for this service."

Later, when the patrol-wagon had been called and the prisoners sent away, and when the detective was taking leave of Sandy, and Gunn, and Buttons, before returning to the Cretorian Club with Gereaux, Sandy said in an undertone to the detective:

"If you ever want to do me a favor, Nick Carter, remember what I said to you about Buttons and his dreams."

THE END.

The next number (630) will contain "An Heiress to Millions; or, Nick Carter's Remarkable Fee."

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PABLO MARISCAL.

By WM. MURRAY GRAYDON.

A dirty, faded sombrero, with the trail of a bullet torn diametrically through the crown, hanging on the wall over my friend's desk. Not a very attractive object in itself, but from its peculiar location I felt that some interesting tale was connected with it, and curiosity led me to ask the question.

"Yes," said Sydney Heller, as he lifted it from its hook and handed it to me to examine, "there is a story connected with that head-piece. It recalls the most stirring episode of my adventurous life. That sombrero once belonged to the celebrated outlaw, Pablo Mariscal, and the bullet that tore through the crown came from my trusty Winchester. Ten years ago, as you may remember, I was residing in southern Arizona, and my brief residence in that part of the country resulted in my being elected sheriff—a high tribute to my popularity, I confess, but by no means an honor that I desired. Why that office was an unenviable one you shall see farther on.

"Pablo Mariscal was at that time the terror of the neighborhood. He was a treacherous, passionate Mexican, who thought no more of destroying human life than you or I would of shooting a rabbit. If a traveler was found murdered on the plains under mysterious circumstances, people shook their heads and whispered: 'Pablo Mariscal.'

"Yet the scamp was a wary fellow, and took good care to permit no crime to be traced home to him. Fresh outrages kept cropping up continually to keep his name before the public, but they never happened to come under my jurisdiction, and, to tell the truth, I was glad of it. I had no desire to run against Pablo Mariscal.

"During that summer business called me away to a distant town, and on my return, in order to avoid the intense heat, and the sand winds that blow in the daytime, I traveled very early in the morning and late at night—much later in fact than I should have done. On the third night I stopped at a small settlement twenty miles from a house, and started away again very early in the morning, hoping to end my journey before the heat of the day came on. At sunrise I was riding over a vast mesa; or plain. The sandy soil was studded with thorny cactus plants, and the only living creatures in sight were big lizards that slipped from under my horse's feet. I was so deeply interested in the sun glow that was lighting up the distant peaks of a mountain range that I rode to the top of a slight crest, without observing what was before me. Then I lowered my eyes to encounter a striking scene.

"Twenty yards distant lay a dead horse, and beside him on the sand was stretched the body of a man, evidently dead. Half a dozen yards beyond was one of those gullies or washouts that are so common in Arizona, and on the bank of this was another man, bending over with his back toward me. What he was about I could not see.

"My approach through the soft sand had not made the slightest noise, but now my horse gave a slight whinny, and the stranger wheeled instantly, revealing the swarthy features of—Pablo Mariscal. The rascal's own rifle was lying beside the dead stranger, and his horse was picketed some yards off. With a sharp cry, partly of surprise, partly of anger, he snatched a revolver from his belt and leveled it at me before I could unstrap my Winchester. My sudden appearance had unnerved him. Bang! Bang! one bullet whizzed by my ear, the other grazed my horse's flank, and, plunging frantically, the beast dashed for the gully. The Mexican fired another shot at close quarters. The horse saved me. With a bullet through his brain, the poor brute wheeled forward and went into the gully head foremost. I sprang from his back, and landed, feet first, just as the horse crashed down beside me. I kept my wits about me, though, and catching a fleeting glimpse of Mariscal in the act of firing, I drew a hasty bead on him and pulled the trigger. He fired at the same instant, but both shots apparently missed, and as I dropped behind the horse I saw the Mexican dart under shelter of a big boulder that stood in the very center of the gully, thirty feet away from my position.

"The situation was now a critical one. The chances were fairly even, but it startled me to think that one of us must succumb to the other. My brief touch of nervousness passed away, however, and I became cool and collected. With my eyebrows slightly elevated over the horse's back and the barrel of my Winchester trained on the rock, I waited the first move from my desperate enemy.

"I undoubtedly had the advantage of him, and it behooved me to keep it. The minutes passed slowly enough, and the strain was beginning to tell on my nerves when I suddenly espied the tiny muzzle of a revolver peeping from a corner of the boulder. This flashed an idea into my mind. I had done some pretty fair rifle-shooting in my time—though I must confess I had made several ignominious failures a few moments before—and here was a chance to test my skill.

"Taking a careful aim, I pulled the trigger, and to my inexpressible satisfaction saw Mariscal's weapon go spinning up against the side of the gully, where it was impossible for him to reach it without exposing himself to my fire. My delight was short-lived, however, as I reflected that he no doubt had another weapon in his belt.

"Ten minutes more passed and then the miscreant's sombrero appeared over the top of the rock as though he were trying to obtain a peep at me.

"Whether it was a trick on his part, or a careless error, I don't know to this day. Not caring to take any chances, though, I blazed away, and the hat went spinning into the air, pierced through the crown. After this all was silence again for a long time. Mariscal made not the slightest move, and I concluded that he probably intended to tire me out, or compel me to show my hand. Meanwhile, the sun was creeping higher and higher, and presently its sweltering rays found their way into the gully and began to make things decidedly uncomfortable. The very ground grew warm, and my rifle-barrel was hot to the touch.

"Suddenly I fancied I saw a slight movement on the right side of the rock, and as I fixed my gaze on the spot Mariscal's head appeared for one brief second on just the opposite side and a revolver-ball plowed into the horse not an inch from my ear. An involuntary jerk of the head was all that had saved me, Mariscal's clever ruse had nearly succeeded. He was back behind shelter before I could get a shot, and I determined to be more watchful in future.

"The sun's rays grew hotter and hotter, and, after enduring them with what patience I could summon for some minutes longer, I concluded that it was high time for the farce to end.

"I was on the point of rising boldly and moving forward in hopes of getting the first shot, when a plan flashed into my mind that offered more security and better chance of success.

"Not ten yards to the rear of my position the gully made a rather sharp bend to the right, and I felt pretty sure that the body of my horse concealed the nearest angle from Mariscal's view. If I could crawl stealthily away, keeping the horse constantly between the range of the Mexican's vision, I might get round the bend unseen, climb out of the gully and approach my enemy from the rear. It was a bit of strategy well worth trying, and I at once prepared to carry it out. I had a revolver in my belt—a big 44-caliber—and I placed this on the body of the dead horse in such a way that the muzzle only could be seen from the rock. It was a poor imitation of the bore of my Winchester, I knew, but I trusted that the distance would prevent Mariscal from discovering the ruse. All the while, of course, I held my eye on the rifle and on the rock.

"Everything was now in readiness, and, dropping on hands and knees, I began to crawl slowly backward. As I receded from the horse the top of the rock came in sight, and I had to get down still lower until I was fairly squirming like a serpent. The suspense of those few moments may be imagined. Inch by inch I crept toward the coveted angle, peering over my shoulder occasionally to get my bearings. The rifle I held, cocked, in one hand, hoping to have still a chance for life if the miscreant should discover my stratagem and attempt to get the drop on me.

"The last couple of yards I grew so nervous that I was afraid to look round, and I actually brought up against the side of the gully. A glance showed me that the angle was close at hand, and a few more wriggling motions brought me to the turn. Rising cautiously on hands and knees I could see the top of the rock distinctly. So far all was well.

"I turned deliberately and scuttled round the bend.

"When I looked again the horse and the rock were both out of sight.

"Overjoyed at my present success, I rose fearlessly and looked over the edge of the gully. The coast was clear, and, clambering up the side as fast as I could, I bent low and scurried over the plain, making a wide détour to avoid the spot where the Mexican was lurking.

"Then with guarded step I approached the gully again, heading as accurately as I could judge for a spot ten yards in the rear of my foe. The horse picketed on the opposite side helped me in my estimate.

"As I advanced foot by foot, and bending down as much as possible, I suddenly spied the crest of the boulder peeping over the brink of the gully, and a second glimpse, as I slowly raised my head, brought Mariscal into plain view. He was stretched flat behind the rock in the broiling sun, his revolver clutched in one hand and his head pressed against the sand at one corner of the boulder. Not the slightest suspicion of my escape could have entered his mind.

"So absorbed was his attitude that I advanced to the very brink of the gully, my Winchester sighted on his head, of course. For a second or two I enjoyed the silent tableau, and then I shouted in a loud, stern voice: 'Drop your weapon and surrender, Pablo! I have you this time.'

"He jerked himself half upright, the most surprised and angry Mexican ever seen, but my Winchester was staring into his eyes at a distance of five yards, and with a bitter imprecation he lowered the weapon he had half raised.

"'Throw it away,' I commanded, and he tossed the revolver across the gully, snapping his black eyes at me furiously. Then I made him rise to his feet, holding his arms above his head in obedience to the command, '*Arriba las manos!*' At this point I was sorely puzzled to know what to do with my captive. I dared not lower the weapon for a single second, and I had about concluded to march him ahead of me across the sun-baked plain, when, to my great relief, a small body of horsemen appeared on the crest of a slight ridge, less than a quarter of a mile away, and a shout speedily drew them to the spot.

"They proved to be in search of Mariscal's victim, who lay dead across the gully. The poor fellow was a merchant from a neighboring town who was expected home early that morning, and, becoming alarmed at his absence, his friends had started out to look for him.

"Mariscal narrowly escaped lynching, but my wiser counsel prevailed, and he was spared to pay the legal penalty for his crime a few months later.

"The sombrero I afterward claimed; and, as no person had a better right to it, it became my property. Do you wonder that I regard it as an interesting memento?"

"No," said I, as I placed it back upon its hook, "I most assuredly do not."

THE ACCIDENT AT THE FOUNDRY.

Twenty years ago I was employed as an inspector of engineering-work of various descriptions, chiefly connected with railways. This occupation brought me constantly in contact with the production and working of iron in all its various branches and in many different parts of the country.

At the time I refer to, a large contract had been placed with a firm in Illinois for the material of an important iron bridge, for the supervision of which I was responsible. This work included the casting of some heavy iron plates of rather complicated design for the caissons of the foundation.

The foundry where my plates were cast was a large open shop, a hundred yards in length and of great height. Across one end of it, at about fifteen feet from the ground, was an iron platform supported on columns, and the mouth of the "cupola," or melting-furnace, which supplied this end of the foundry, was on a level with this platform.

In the center of the platform was a deep bay, or recess, to receive the casting-pot—a huge iron caldron holding some eight or ten tons of molten metal. This was suspended by chains from a massive iron crane erected on the platform. The movement of the crane carried the casting-pot to and from the mouth of the furnace, and enabled it to be placed over any of the molds within reach, so as to run the metal where required.

The next running was to take place in the early morning, before breakfast, and the last thing at night I went round to examine the molds and discuss on difficulties.

The manager of the foundry department, whom I will call Mr. Conyers, happened to be an old friend of many years' standing. He had been a foreman at the works where I served my time, and was an excellent fellow, for whom I had the greatest regard. After talking over the coming day's work with him, we went into a small office partitioned off at the end of the shop under the iron plat-

form, and I made one or two sketches relating to the castings, after which we left the shop together.

"I am going to Chicago by the morning express for a couple of days," said Mr. Conyers. "Would you mind wiring to me if you want anything special?"

I assented, and shortly afterward we parted.

The next morning, soon after six o'clock, I was again in the foundry, where a gang of men were preparing for running in the next charge for our plate-molds. As the operation required prompt movement and separate attendance at each mold, they were standing round in a circle, each man ready to do his own part.

The blazing stream from the cupola was already filling up the great vessel hanging at its mouth, and the men at the crane were waiting to bring the charge out over the molds.

As soon as the furnace men with their irons had lifted off one or two flakes of scum from the glowing surface, the casting-pot began to move majestically outward through the recess, when a mishap occurred, of a kind, unfortunately, too well known in these risky operations.

On a small trolley, underneath the platform, there happened to be standing a long cast-iron rib belonging to some girder work, which had been cleared from the mold and was waiting to be moved away.

Up to the moment of bringing out the present charge from the cupola, nobody had observed that one end of this rib, as it stood in the shadow, projected between the columns just far enough to touch the side of the casting-pot as it passed clear of the platform. It was but a matter of an inch or two; but, as ill fate would have it, just sufficient to tip the great pot forward on its pivot, and cause the weight of the molten mass inside to overbalance it.

The next moment the whole charge of seven or eight tons of liquid iron was poured forth in one tremendous cataract of fire upon the floor of the foundry.

Of course there was a frantic stampede among the men, every one of whom flung down his tools and made a dash for the far end of the shop. The most of them knew by terrible experience the common results of such an accident —namely, that the damp sand of the floor usually causes the hot metal to fly explosively all over the place.

Luckily, although it had been impossible, at a moment's notice, to stop the crane, its comparatively slow movement had given everybody a chance of seeing what was going to happen, and therefore an opportunity of escape. I, who being specially interested in the casting, had placed myself somewhat closer to the molds than any one else, sprang back at once with the same intention.

But at the very instant of doing so I saw before me a sight which, even at that moment of fearful peril, seemed to rivet me to the ground!

In the very middle of the veil of liquid fire, which for three seconds streamed from the tilted caldron to the ground, I saw standing upright, and gazing with a fixed look of astonishment and dismay at me, the figure of George Conyers, the manager!

All power seemed to have gone out of my limbs. The thought thrilled through my brain that at that moment some dire catastrophe had overtaken him also on his journey, and that the mysterious coincidence of our fate had thus brought us in the spirit face to face!

I stood still, gazing at him in like manner; and before I could move again a splash of the melted metal flew at me, struck me on the shoulder, and instantly burned through my clothes.

For a few wild paces I stumbled back once more; and, amid the agonizing pain that followed, fell on the floor, fainting.

I remained unconscious for a considerable time, and on "coming to" found myself lying in an armchair in the counting-room, with several men around me and a doctor at my side, whom I recognized.

"Where is Mr. Conyers?" I exclaimed, starting up as the light came back to me.

"Why, here, to be sure!" replied that gentleman, stepping in front of me; "and as hearty as anybody present at this meeting."

"Why—why——" I muttered, sinking back again. "I thought you were going to Chicago?"

"So I am," answered the manager; "as soon as we've cleared this mess up. But the express is at eight-thirty, and it isn't seven yet."

"Where were you?" I said, still hopelessly bewildered.

"In the little office under the crane, of course. I rushed out when I heard the shouting, and was nearly as scared as you were when I saw you staring at me over the molds like that."

"I can't understand it," I replied, still half-regarding him as a disembodied spirit.

"Why, bless the man!" said Mr. Conyers, with a merry laugh, "how many weeks have you been mixed up with the foundry trade? Have you been an iron-worker all these years and didn't know that clean molten iron, when it is quite liquid, is transparent like water? I was on one side of the stream, and you on the other, and we saw each other through it!"

Such, indeed, was the explanation of the mystery, and with all my years of experience and powers of observation, I had never taken any note of this curious natural fact. But having, as I said before, had it brought home to me in the manner just related, I think the reader will agree that I am never likely to forget it.

RECOVERING GOLD FROM SAND.

To the mouth of the River Colne, off Brightlingsea, England, an extraordinary machine was towed and anchored recently. It is to be used in a final attempt to recover the $2,500,000 treasure of gold, in coins and bars, which is said to have gone down in H. M. S. *Lutine* in 1797, near the island of Terschelling, off the coast of Holland.

A portion of the treasure has been recovered, but all ordinary dredging-plants are now useless, as the vessel has sunk into the sand. The new device is a great steel tube nearly one hundred feet in length, and wide enough to allow a man to walk erect down its center. At one end is a metal chamber provided with windows and doors, and at the other a medley of giant hooks and other tackle.

The apparatus has just been completed after years of work by a firm of shipbuilders. "One end of the tube," explained a member of the firm, "will be clamped to the side of a steamship or barge. The other end, by means of water ballast tanks, will be sunk until it touches the bottom. Then, by means of compressed air, all the water will be forced from the tube and also from the chamber at the bottom of it, flush upon the bed of the sea.

"Divers will walk down a stairway in the center of the tube until they reach the submerged chamber. Here they will don their diving-costumes, and, opening a series of water-tight doors, will step straight out into the water. Engineers will be stationed in the chamber, and, following the instructions of the divers, who will communicate with them by means of portable telephones, they will operate the mechanism of two powerful suction pumps, or dredgers, which are fitted to the sides of the tube. These dredgers, it is hoped, will suck away the sand around the sides of the heavy chamber until it gradually sinks by its own weight right down onto the deck of the wrecked ship. Then the divers, making their way from the chamber to the deck of the ship and thence to the hold, will be able to transfer the treasure from the ship to the chamber by easy stages."

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